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BERTOLT BRECHT:

Socrates Wounded

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Socrates, son of a midwife, was expert at light-heartedly delivering his friends of well-formed thoughts, and thus presented them with children of their own instead of imposing bastards on them the way most teachers do. Not only was he thought the smartest of Greeks but also one of the most courageous. And this reputation for courage seems quite just when we read in Plato how willingly, how gaily he emptied the hemlock-cup which the authorities finally handed him for his services to his fellow citizens. But some of his admirers want to speak of his courage in the field as well. As a matter of fact, he fought in the battle of Delion with the lightly armed foot-soldiers. He wasn't enlisted in the more elegant and expensive ranks: neither his position (he was a cobbler) nor his income (that of a philosopher) would warrant it. And yet his courage, as you might well imagine, was of a very special kind.

On the morning of the battle Socrates had prepared himself for the bloody business as well as he could by chewing onions, which, said the soldiers, engenders courage. His skepticism in certain areas

made him gullible in many other areas. Since he believed in practical experience as opposed to speculation, he believed not in the gods but in onions.

Unfortunately he noted no real effect, at least no immediate one, and so he trotted gloomily along with a detachment of swordsmen goose-stepping into position on a stubbly field. Behind and before him stumbled the young Athenians from poorer suburbs, who remarked that the shields of the Athenian provision-merchants were cut too small for fat people like him. This thought had occurred to him, too, except that he had found the *stocky* people not half covered by the ridiculously narrow shields.

The interchange of ideas between the man in front of him and the one behind concerning the profits of the great armor-smithies from overly small shields was interrupted by the command: "Positions."

They settled to the stubbly ground, but a captain objected when Socrates tried to sit down on his own shield. Socrates was more troubled by the muted voice with which he obeyed than by the commanding snarl. Then the enemy appeared to have been discovered nearby. Although the milky morning fog prevented much of a view, the sounds of steps and rattling arms told him that the field was occupied.

Socrates painfully remembered a conversation of the previous evening with an elegant young man whom he had once met backstage, now a cavalry officer.

"A capital plan!" the young fop had declared. "The infantry simply stands in its position, loyal and upright, and receives the thrust of the foe. Meanwhile the cavalry advances in the lowland and takes them from the rear."

The lowland must have been considerably to the right, somewhere in the fog. Then that must be where the cavalry was advancing.

The plan had sounded good to Socrates, or at any rate not bad. After all, there are always plans, especially when you're weaker than the enemy. In reality you simply fight, that is, hack away. For you don't advance where the plan calls for it, but where the foe permits.

Now, in the grey light of morning, Socrates thought this plan pretty miserable. What did it mean: the infantry receives the thrust of the foe? Normally you're delighted if you can dodge a thrust, and now the trick was to receive it?! Wasn't it too bad that the commander himself was a horseman!

In all the market you couldn't find as many onions as the ordinary man needed.

And how unnatural it was, instead of lying in bed so early in the morning, to sit here in the middle of a field on the bare earth, with at least ten pounds of iron on the body and a butcher knife in the hand! True, you have to defend the city when it's attacked, or you flounder into trouble, but why was the city attacked? Because the shippers, vineyard-owners, and slave-dealers in Asia Minor had spiked a wheel of the Persian shippers, vineyard-owners, and slave-dealers! A fine reason!

Suddenly they all sat frozen.

Out of the fog to the left came a muffled roar, accompanied by a metallic clanging. It grew rapidly. The attack of the foe had begun. The detachment rose. With bulging eyes the men stared forward into the fog. Ten paces to the side a man fell to his knees and stammered a cry to the gods. Too late, thought Socrates.

Suddenly, like an answer, there followed a terrible bellowing on the right. The shout of help seemed to change into a shout of death. Socrates saw a small iron rod fly out of the fog. A javelin! And then, indistinct in the mist, massive figures cropped up ahead: the foe.

Socrates, under the overpowering impression that he might have waited too long already, turned clumsily and started to run. The breastplate and heavy leg-irons hindered him quite a bit. They were much more dangerous than shields, for you couldn't throw them away.

Panting, the philosopher ran over the stubble. Everything depended on whether he could gain a good start. He hoped that the brave lads behind him would hold off the first thrust of the foe for a time.

Suddenly he was struck by a hellish pain. His left sole burned so fiercely that he thought he couldn't stand it. Groaning he eased himself to the ground, but sprang up again with a new cry of pain. With wild eyes he looked about him and understood. He had blundered into a field of thorns!

It was a confusion of low hedges with very sharp thorns. In his foot too a thorn must have stuck. Carefully, with tears in his eyes, he searched for a place on the ground where he could sit. On his good foot he hobbled a few steps in a circle before he lowered himself a second time. He had to pull out the thorn at once.

In suspense he listened for sounds of battle: these stretched for some distance to both sides, but he was at least a hundred paces back of the line. Nevertheless they seemed to approach him slowly and unmistakably.

Socrates could not pull the sandal off. The thorn had bored through the thin sole and fixed deeply in the flesh. How dare they expect the soldiers, defenders of the fatherland against the foe, to fight in thin soles like these! Every jolt of the sandal was followed by a searing pain. Exhausted, the poor man let his great shoulders sink forward. What was to be done?

His sad eyes fell on the sword beside him. A thought shot through his brain more welcome than any that had ever come to him in a dialogue. Could one use the sword as a knife? He grabbed for it.

At this moment he heard the muffled tread of boots. A small troop broke through the brush. The gods be praised, they were his comrades! They stood there a few seconds when they saw him. "That's the cobbler" he heard them say. Then they went on.

But now from the left came another noise and commands in a foreign tongue. The Persians!

Socrates tried to get to his feet again, that is, the right foot. He leaned on the sword, but it proved just a little too short. And then he saw a knot of fighters emerge in the slight clearing to the left. He heard groans and the striking of dull iron on iron or leather.

In desperation he hopped backwards on his good foot. Tipping over, he stepped onto his wounded foot again and he sank down, groaning. The fighting throng, a matter of perhaps twenty or thirty men, approached a few steps; the philosopher was sitting on his bottom between two thorn bushes, helplessly looking toward the foe.

It was impossible to move. Anything was preferable to feeling this pain in the ball of his foot again. He did not know what to do, and suddenly he started to roar.

Exactly described, it was like this: he heard himself roar. He heard himself roar from his capacious chest, like a fishwife: "This way, third detachment! Give them the sour stuff, my lads!"

And at the same time he found himself grasping his sword and swinging it in a circle all around him, for a Persian soldier had emerged from the brush and stood before him, spear in hand. Suddenly the spear vanished and the man with it.

And Socrates heard himself roar a second time and say: "Not another shoe's breadth back, my lads! Now we have them where we want them, the puppy dogs! Krapolus, forward with the sixth! Nullos, to the right! Anyone who retreats I'll tear to shreds!"

He was astonished to find two men of his camp at his side, staring down at him, horrified. "Shout," he said softly, "shout, for heaven's

sake!" One of them dropped his jaw in terror, but the other actually started to roar something or other. And the Persian in front of them rose with difficulty and ran into the brush. A dozen weary men stumbled from the clearing. The roaring had turned the Persians to flight. They feared an ambush.

"What's going on here?" one of the men asked Socrates, who still sat on the ground.

"Nothing," said he. "Don't stand around like that and stare at me. Better run about and give commands so they can't tell over there how few of us there are."

"Better go back," said the man, hesitating.

"Not a step," protested Socrates. "Are you chicken-livered?"

Luckily, since the soldier will not be driven by fear alone but must have hope too, they heard in the distance galloping and wild shouting, and the shouts were clearly Greek! We all know how devastating this day's defeat of the Persians was. It ended the war.

When Alcibiades at the head of his cavalry came to the field of thorns he saw a crowd of foot-soldiers carrying a fat man on their shoulders. Stopping his horse, he recognized Socrates, and the soldiers explained how his unshakable resistance had brought the tottering line of battle to a standstill.

In triumph they carried him to the corps. There, despite his protests, they put him on a supply wagon and carried him back to the capital, surrounded by sweat-drenched, excitedly shouting soldiers. On their shoulders they carried him to his little house and left him there.

Xanthippe, his wife, was cooking his bean soup. Kneeling before the hearth and blowing up the fire with full cheeks, she looked at him now and then. He still sat on the chair in which his comrades had put him down.

"What happened to *you*?" she asked suspiciously.

"To me?" he mumbled. "Nothing."

"What's all this talk about your heroic deeds?" she wanted to know.

"Exaggerations," he said. "It smells very good."

"How can it smell when I don't have the fire going yet? You have made a fool of yourself again, eh?" she said angrily. "And when I go to buy a loaf tomorrow I'll get all the snickering again."

"I haven't made a fool of myself at all. I've been fighting."

"Were you drunk?"

"No. I brought them to a stand when they were retreating."

"Why, you can't even bring yourself to a stand," said she, getting

up, for the fire was burning. "Give me the saltshaker from the table."

"I do not know," he said slowly and thoughtfully, "I do not know if I had rather not eat anything at all. I spoiled my digestion a little."

"I told you already, you're drunk. Try to stand up and walk across the room, and then we can tell."

Her injustice embittered him. But under no circumstances was he going to get up and show her that he couldn't take a step. She was uncannily clever when it came to discovering something to his disadvantage. And it would be unfortunate if the telling reason for his sturdy resistance in the battle became known.

She continued to handle the pot on the stove and meanwhile explained her thoughts to him.

"I'm convinced that your elegant friends have found you a slacker's post in the rear again, with the mess corps. Nothing but corruption there."

Tormented, he looked out through the window opening into the street. People were roaming about with white lanterns, celebrating the victory.

His elegant friends had not tried any such thing: anyway he would not have accepted, at least not without a fuss.

"Or did they find it quite fitting that the cobbler march too? They don't stir a little finger on your behalf. He's a cobbler, they say, and a cobbler he'll remain. How can we visit him in his dirt-hole otherwise and gossip with him by the hour and hear all the world say: Look there, whether he is a cobbler or not, these elegant persons visit with him and talk to him about philersophy. Dirty pack of scoundrels!"

"The word is philerphobia," said he calmly.

"Don't always be teaching me. I know how uneducated I am. If I weren't, you'd have no one to bring you a tub of water to wash your feet now and then."

He winced, and then hoped she hadn't noticed. He couldn't let it come to foot-washing today at any cost. The gods be praised, she was already going on in her harangue.

"Well then, you weren't drunk and they didn't get you a soft job. Then you must have behaved like a butcher. You have blood on your hands, eh? But when I step on a spider you start shouting at me. Not that I believe you actually stood up to your man, but you must, after all, have done something smart, something in a roundabout way that they pound you on the shoulders like that. But I'll find you out yet, rely on it."

The soup was ready now. It smelled tempting. The woman took the pot, holding the handle by her skirt, set it on the table, and started to ladle it out. Perhaps he should regain his appetite: but the idea that he would then have to get to the table decided him in time.

He didn't feel well. Clearly the affair wasn't yet done. Surely all sorts of unpleasantness would come up shortly. One doesn't decide the battle against the Persians and remain unscathed. Now, in the first joy of victory, they naturally didn't think of the man who had earned it. For a time they would keep busy trumpeting their own worthy deeds about. But tomorrow or the day after everyone would see his colleague claiming the fame for himself and then they would pick on him. A lot of them could scorch each other's tails by declaring the cobbler the real hero-in-chief. For Alcibiades was not in the best graces anyway. They'd be delighted to shout to him: you won the battle, but a cobbler fought it out.

And the thorn was giving him a wilder pain than ever. If he did not get the sandal off soon, it could come to blood-poisoning.

"Don't smack your lips like that," he said absently.

"What am I doing?"

"Nothing," startled, he quickly assured her. "I was just thinking."

Agitated, she got up, threw the pot onto the stove and ran out.

He breathed a deep sigh of relief. Hastily he worked himself out of the chair and hopped to his couch, timidly looking about him. When she came in again she looked at him suspiciously, lying motionless in the leather-covered hammock. For a moment she thought there might be something really wrong with him. She even considered asking him about it, really being very devoted to him. But she thought of something better and grumpily left the room to watch the festivities with her neighbor.

Socrates slept badly and fitfully and woke up with worries. He had gotten the sandal off but he hadn't been able to get hold of the thorn. The foot was much swollen.

His wife wasn't very lively this morning. The night before she had heard the whole city talk about her husband. Something must actually have happened to impress people like that. That he had stopped a whole Persian line of battle did not enter her head at all. Not he, she thought. To stop a whole company with his questions — yes, that he could do. But not a line of battle. Then what could have happened?

She was so unsure about all this that she brought the goat's milk to his couch.

He made no effort to get up.

"Don't you want to go out?" she asked.

"Don't care to," he growled.

That was no way to answer a polite question from your wife, but she thought he might possibly want to avoid exposing himself to the stares of the people, so she let the answer pass.

Visitors started arriving well before noon — first two young people, sons of well-to-do parents, his usual circle. They always treated him as their teacher and some even took notes when he talked to them as though it were something quite special.

Today they immediately reported to him that Athens was full of his glory. It was an historic date in philosophy (then she was right — the word was philersophy and nothing else). Socrates had proved that the hero in ideas could also be the hero in action.

Socrates listened to them without the usual urge to mock. While they spoke he seemed to hear, the way you can hear a distant storm, monstrous laughter — the laughter of a whole city, even of a country, far away but steadily approaching, pulling near and infecting everyone: the passers-by on the streets, the shopkeepers and the politicians in the market-place, the artisans in their little shops.

"It's all nonsense, what you say there," said he with sudden decision. "I have done nothing."

Smiling they looked at each other. Then the one said:

"Exactly what we said too. We knew that you would take it that way. What is all this sudden screaming about, we asked Eusopolos in front of the gymnasium. For ten years Socrates has achieved great deeds of the spirit and no one has even turned to look at him. Now he has won a battle and all of Athens talks about him. Don't you realize how shameful that is?"

Socrates groaned.

"But I didn't win it at all. I defended myself because I was attacked. I wasn't interested in this battle. I'm neither an armorer nor the owner of vineyards nearby. Why should I win battles? I was stuck between lots of sensible people from the suburbs who aren't interested in butchery, and I did exactly what all of them did too, at most a few moments before them."

They were amazed.

"It's not true," they cried. "That is what we said too. He did nothing but defend himself. That's his manner of winning battles. Pardon us for hurrying back to the gymnasium. We interrupted a

conversation on this topic to give you our greetings."

And they left, immersed in the delights of their discourse.

Socrates lay silent, propped on his elbows, and gazed at the soot-blackened ceiling. He had been right in his dismal forebodings.

His wife observed him from the corner of the room. She flicked mechanically at her old skirt.

Suddenly she softly spoke: "Well, what's behind it?"

He started. Uncertainly he looked at her.

She was an overworked woman, with a bosom like a board and sad eyes. He knew that he could rely on her. She would still take his part when his students would say: Socrates? Isn't that this odious cobbler who denies the gods? She had a hard time with him, but she never complained except to him. And there hadn't been an evening when bread and a piece of bacon on the shelf hadn't been waiting for him when he came home hungry from his well-to-do pupils.

He wondered if he should tell her everything. But then he remembered that in the coming days he would have to say a great deal that was untrue and hypocritical in her presence, when people came as they had just then and spoke of his heroic deeds. And he couldn't do that if she knew the truth: he respected her.

So he let it be and only said: "Last night's cold bean soup is smelling up the whole room again."

She only cast a new distrustful look at him.

Naturally they were in no position to throw out food. He was only looking for something to put her off the track. The conviction grew in her that there was something wrong with him. Why didn't he stand up? He always got up late, but only because he went to bed late. Yesterday it had been early. And today the whole city was on its legs for the celebrations. In the street the shops were closed. A part of the cavalry had returned at five o'clock in the morning from pursuing the foe — they had heard the galloping. Gatherings of people were a passion with him. On days like this he usually ran around from early to late and buttonholed discussions. Then why didn't he get up?

The door darkened and four magistrates came in. They stood in the middle of the room and one said in a businesslike but altogether polite tone that he had the commission to bring Socrates to the Areopagus. Field Marshal Alcibiades himself had made the proposal that an honor be prepared him for his soldierly achievements.

A buzzing from the street showed that the neighbors were gathering in front of the house.

Socrates felt the sweat breaking out. He knew that he had to get up now and, even if he declined to go along, he would at least have to say something polite and conduct these people to the door. And he knew that he wouldn't get farther than two steps at most. Then they would look at his foot and know the truth. And the great laughter would begin, here and now.

So, instead of getting up, he let himself sink back onto the hard cushion, and he said dejectedly:

"I need no honor. Tell the Areopagus that I have made an appointment for eleven o'clock with some friends to look into a philosophical question which interests us, and therefore I regret that I cannot come. I am not at all suited to public occasions and am far too tired."

He added that last bit because he was angry with himself for having dragged philosophy into it, and he said the first because he hoped to be rid of them most easily by being churlish.

The magistrates understood this language too. They turned on their heels and left, treading on the toes of the people who stood outside.

"They'll teach you courtesy to officials yet," said his wife angrily and went into the kitchen.

Socrates waited until she was outside, and then quickly turned his heavy body over in the bed, sat up on the edge of the bed, squinting at the door, and tried with infinite care to step down on his ailing foot. It seemed hopeless.

Streaming with sweat he lay back. A half hour passed. He took up a book and read. If he kept his foot motionless he felt hardly anything.

Then came his friend Antisthenes.

He didn't take off his heavy mantle, but remained standing at the foot of the bed, coughed in a cramped way and scratched his scrubby beard at his neck, looking down at Socrates.

"You're still lying down? I thought I'd find only Xanthippe in. But I got up expressly to ask about you. I had a bad cold and so couldn't be here yesterday."

"Have a seat," said Socrates, monosyllabically.

Antisthenes brought a chair from the corner and sat down by his friend.

"This evening I'm starting instruction again. No reason to wait longer."

"No," Socrates agreed.

"Naturally I asked myself if they'd come. The big feasts are today. But on the way here I met young Pheston, and when I told him I would give algebra in the evening he was simply delighted. I said he could come in his helmet. Protagoras and the others will split with anger when they hear that they went on studying algebra with Antisthenes on the evening after the battle."

Socrates swung slightly in his hammock, pushing himself with the flat of the hand against the wall. With his bulging eyes he looked searchingly at his friend.

"Did you meet anyone else?"

"Lots of people."

Moodily Socrates looked at the ceiling. Should he pour clear wine for Antisthenes? He was pretty sure of him. He himself never took money for lessons so he was no competition for Antisthenes. Perhaps he should really reveal his difficult position.

Antisthenes looked with curiosity out of his sparkling whimsical eyes and reported:

"Gorgias goes about and tells everyone that you must have run away and made your way in the wrong direction by confusion, that is, forward. A couple of the better young men already want to give him a thrashing for it."

Socrates looked at him, unpleasantly surprised.

"Nonsense," said he, angered. It was suddenly clear to him what cards his opponents held if he should show his hand.

He had thought at night, toward morning, that he might palm the whole affair off as an experiment and say he wished to see how great everyone's gullibility might be. "For twenty years I have been teaching pacifism in all the streets, and one rumor was enough for my own pupils to think I had gone mad, etc., etc." But then the battle should not have been won. This was a notoriously poor time for pacifism. After a defeat even the higher-ups were pacifists for a while, and after a victory even the little people were war-mongers, at least until they noticed that for them there was no very great difference between victory and defeat. No, he couldn't get anywhere with pacifism now.

Galloping was heard from the street. Riders halted at the house and Alcibiades stepped in with his swinging gait.

"Good morning, Antisthenes, how is the philosophy business? They're beside themselves," he cried, gleaming. "They're raging on the Areopagus at your answer, Socrates. For the joke of it I've with-

drawn my proposal to award you the laurel crown and suggested an award of fifteen cracks with a cane. Naturally they ignored this since it met their inclinations exactly. But still, you must come along. We two will go together, on foot."

Socrates sighed. He stood very well with young Alcibiades. Often they had drunk together. It was friendly of Alcibiades to look him up. It was surely not just the wish to offend the Aeropagus. And this last wish was honorable and deserved support.

Thoughtfully he said at last, still rocking in his hammock, "Haste is what the wind says that upsets the framework of the house. Take a seat."

Alcibiades laughed and pulled up a chair. Before he sat down he courteously bowed to Xanthippe, who stood in the kitchen door wiping her wet hands on her skirt.

"You philosophers are funny people," he said a little impatiently. "Maybe you're already sorry that you helped us win the battle. Antisthenes has probably called your attention to the fact that there was not enough reason for it?"

"We spoke of algebra," said Antisthenes quickly and coughed again.

Alcibiades grinned.

"I expected nothing else. You don't want to make a fuss over a thing like this, eh? Well, in my opinion it was sheer bravery. Nothing special, if you will, but what is so special about a handful of laurel leaves? Grit your teeth and let it pass over you, old man. It's over quickly and doesn't hurt. And then we'll have a quick one."

Curiously he looked at the broad, strong body that had now begun to rock violently.

Socrates thought it over quickly. Something that he could say had occurred to him. He could say that he had sprained his foot last night or that morning. For instance, when the soldiers had let him down from their shoulders. There was even a moral to it. This affair showed how easily honors at the hands of one's fellow citizens could bring one to misfortune.

Without stopping to rock he leaned forward so that he sat up, rubbed his bare left arm with his right hand and said slowly, "The thing is thus. My foot . . ."

At this word his gaze, which was not quite steady, for he was now to speak the first real lie in this matter, having been only silent up to this point, fell on Xanthippe who stood in the kitchen door.

Speech failed Socrates. Suddenly he felt no inclination to present his story. His foot was not sprained.

"Listen, Alcibiades," he said energetically and with a wholly fresh voice, "one cannot speak of bravery in this case. As soon as the battle began, that is, when I saw the first Persians emerge, I instantly ran off, and that in the right direction, to the rear. But there was a thistle field in the way. I got a thorn in my foot and couldn't go on. So then I beat around me like a wild man and almost hit some of our own men. In desperation I shouted some stuff about other detachments so that the Persians would think that there were some, which didn't make sense, for naturally they don't understand Greek. On the other hand, they seem to have been rather nervous anyway. Probably they just couldn't stand the roaring any more, after all they must have gone through on the preparatory march. They faltered a moment and just then the cavalry arrived. That's all."

For a few seconds it was very quiet in the room. Alcibiades stared at him fixedly. Antisthenes coughed against his hand, this time quite naturally. From the kitchen door where Xanthippe stood came a reverberating laughter.

Then Antisthenes dryly said:

"And so naturally you couldn't go to the Aeropagus and limp up the steps to accept the laurel crown. I understand that."

Alcibiades lay back in his chair and observed the philosopher with half-closed eyes. His narrow boyish face twitched a little, but he revealed nothing of his thoughts or feelings.

"Why didn't you say you had some other wound?" he asked.

"Because I have a thorn in my foot," said Socrates roughly.

"Oh, because of that?" said Alcibiades. "I understand."

He quickly stood up and stepped to the bed.

"Pity that I didn't bring my own crown along. I gave it to my man to hold. Otherwise I would leave it here now for you. Believe me, I think you brave enough. I know no one else who would have told, under the circumstances, what you just told us."

And he went out quickly.

Later, when Xanthippe bathed his foot and pulled out the thorn, she said crossly:

"It could have come to blood-poisoning."

"At least that," said the philosopher.

RUTH STONE:

The Season

I know what calls the Devil from the pits;
With a thief's fingers, there he slouches and sits.
I've seen him passing on a frenzied mare,
Bitter-eyed on her haunches, out to stare;
He rides her cruel and he rides her easy.
Come along spring, come along sun, come along field daisy.

Smell the foxy babies, smell the hunting dog;
The shes have whelped, the cocks and hens have lost their wits;
And cry, "Why," cry the spring peepers, "Why," each little frog.
He rides her cruel and he rides her easy.
Come along spring, come along sun, come along field daisy.

From the Window

This lady who wintered poorly had thin hair
And sat in the sun under the cascades
Of forsythia; with a towel and a mirror,
In black sateen pajamas. I do not think
In all of Hades there are such desperate shades
As thin-haired ladies. The mirror flashed,
I winked, under the forsythia flowers her stare
Into the cruel glass fished up a mole,
Horrors, and two wild hairs she plucked,
And then she snipped her finger tips.
I smelled the steam from molded snows,
And in the pool of sunny heat the wind lashed
The gold forsythia and the sun sucked.

The Splinter

I had a little silver mannikin
Who walked and talked and petted me.
I pampered him, he pampered me, we
Were convivial. On the gray streets
Of many a gray city he wept with me.
Oh then how miniature was sin,
How clear its purpose like a looking glass
To show me my young girl's skin.

But I looked and looked again
And saw a blue cadaverous vein.
I will grow old, I cried,
You are a silver groom,
I will be a brown leather bride.
You are imperishable, still by my side
You will shine in the wine
That puckers my hide.

And in these sad reflections
I took a silver hammer made of words,
And hit him and he shattered like bright birds
Flying in all directions.
All night and all eternity I cried,
And in the morning by the gray light
I found his splinter in my side,
And when I drew it out, I saw it was glass —
The finest concave mirror, silver white
And backed with brightest silver. Oh alas,
He was a mannikin of glass with all his light turned in,
And mirrored in the dark, the mannikin.

BRUCE CUTLER:

Visions

Mirrored in animal eyes,
stars are like fireflies;
goatherds believe
Angels are what they see.

Laboring under the eyes
of plow-pullers, near a sty,
the girl no one believes
turns her cries into melodies.

Flame in his glazed eyes,
Satan sees:
the Child on homespun lies
between her knees.

Ox Driver

Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry

October. Sows and boars crash in the leaves
of maple groves. Simmering oak
branches, the color of blood, soak
up strength from a dying sun. Heaves
have broken the horse's wind
and frost covers his watering trough; a cracked
oven burns the meat and gives our wine a sacked
taste. My hands so cold they feel skinned—
still, the ox plows pastern-deep, opening neat
furrows to broadcast winter wheat.

ISABEL GAMBLE:

The Secret Sharer in 'Mrs. Dalloway'

Writing in her diary of Milton, Virginia Woolf spoke of "the sublime aloofness and impersonality of the emotion" in *Paradise Lost,* and added: "I can conceive that even Shakespeare after this would seem a little troubled, personal, hot and imperfect."[1] The observation is not especially original, but since it brings together for a rare instant two antithetical artists, it will serve as a chart on which to fix two positions in the surge of literary history. They are positions at the opposite ends of a world: on one hand, the sublime impersonality of Milton, recording the universals of our life; on the other, troubled perhaps, but neither hot nor imperfect, Virginia Woolf, devoting her art to the definition and exploration of the unique — that is, personality. If we bring in Shakespeare for symmetry's sake, we shall find him as usual a violator of categories; accepting no "place," he is the agile runner of the scale's whole gamut.

Such versatile harmonizers are, however, rare. And within the last hundred years or so, we can observe a steady movement toward Virginia Woolf's end of the scale. It is part of the modern temper to regard and to value the unique; part of the modern sensibility to record and verify, in art, the inexhaustible inscapes of life. Hopkins' term *inscape* and his own practice of precise sensory delineation are symptoms of a bias shared by many — even most — of the writers who followed him. "It is the rehearsal Of own, of abrupt self there so thrusts on, so throngs the ear," he wrote in 1879; fifty years later, the same note thrust itself on the ear of Virginia Woolf. Looking back over a century of English literature, to Scott and Jane Austen, she wrote:

> They seem deliberately to refuse to gratify those senses which are stimulated so briskly by the moderns; the senses of sight, of sound, of touch — above all, the sense of the human being, his depth and the variety of his perceptions, his complexity, his confusion, his self, in short.[2]

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[1] *A Writer's Diary,* 10 September, 1918; ed. Leonard Woolf (London, 1953), pp. 5-6.
[2] "How It Strikes a Contemporary," *The Common Reader* (New York, 1925), p. 328.

For an instant, she longed to escape from "the cramp and confinement of personality"; yet, in the same year that *The Common Reader* appeared, she published also one of the most searching explorations of selfhood produced by the modern consciousness: *Mrs. Dalloway.* Three years before, in *Jacob's Room,* she had set herself the task of collecting, from the debris of places, possessions, memories, and "spots of time," the elements of a dead boy's personality. In *The Waves,* six years later, she was to build a "plot" of parallel and interwoven threads: six characters in search of themselves, undergoing, each in his own way, what Yeats called "the infinite pain of self-realization." "And now I ask, 'Who am I?'" says Bernard, as he begins his final soliloquy. It is the most persistent question of Virginia Woolf's characters.

One can assemble a good deal of testimony to the urgency, and the relative novelty, of the query, "Who am I?"

> The species to which Sophocles and Racine belonged took everything at its face value; "the ancients" did not look around the corner or beneath the surface; they never turned their eyes from the hard, bright world immediately in front of them to peer into the dim regions of their own mind and personality.[3]

Allowing for the deliberate oversimplification of this opinion, we may still admit that absorption in the mystery of the self is the peculiar malady or gift of the minds we think of as "modern." At any rate, the exploration of these "dim regions" by Conrad, in the half-generation before Virginia Woolf, is one way to account for his special relevance and appeal for us. His story, *The Secret Sharer,* provides a paradigm for the theme of self-recognition — a theme explicitly stated in the opening movement and affirmed in the fable. The young captain, observing that he is "the only stranger on board" the ship that is his first command, adds: "If all the truth must be told, I was something of a stranger to myself." The story traces the progress of the main character to a satisfying self-knowledge and self-command; in *Mrs. Dalloway,* a similar theme is pursued with great purity and depth, until the heroine's identity is triumphantly discovered in a moment when her "sense of being" expands to touch another life. The vehicles of the theme can be observed on several levels of technique; on at least two of these levels, analogies with Conrad's methods in *The Secret Sharer* can be found, which shed light on the primary object of attention, *Mrs. Dalloway.*

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[3] Leonard Woolf, *After the Deluge* (2 vols., New York, 1931), I, p. 243.

What strikes one in considering this novel is the harmony between theme and technique that makes of it a particularly satisfying aesthetic whole. The clear ring of personality heard through "complexities and confusions": to this note Virginia Woolf's characters, and the author herself, are forever attuned. Because they are so attuned, the novelist must disengage from life's welter certain characteristic patterns of living — of dissolution and integration — that form the rhythmic systole and diastole of the soul's inner being. From this necessity, Virginia Woolf's other typical themes and special techniques follow. The self rings most purely at certain moments of summary intensity, when the layers and rays of the many-faceted ego converge briefly; "as if," one of the characters thinks, "all this fever of living were simplicity itself; and myriads of things merged in one thing." Time, in its two aspects — the moving process and the arrested instant that suspends it —, is regularly noted as an element central to Virginia Woolf's reading of life; its importance is based upon its role as the mode or medium in which the "abrupt self" expresses its being. As Reuben Brower has pointed out in his fine essay on *Mrs. Dalloway,* "the sense of succession, of process, is inseparable from Clarissa's feeling about life."[4] Nevertheless, the experiencing ego, when it rises out of the sea of process into self-awareness, defines itself most readily in a series of isolated moments. "The moment" is the medium for a rounded view of the *entire* self, ordinarily elongated, distorted, and meshed in the half-lights and tangles of mere living; and the endlessly renewed task of selfhood is the creation of a static spatial form out of the insistent changes of time, *"ou rien ne dure, mais ou rien ne cesse."*

One finds the heroine of *Mrs. Dalloway,* near the opening of the novel, submerged in the temporal process, part of an "astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street." She is "with the rest of them," one atom in a moving continuum; and her submergence involves the loss of personality — or rather, its survival only in its social aspect, as "Mrs. Dalloway."

> But often now this body she wore . . . this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing — nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only . . . this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway.

[4] *The Fields of Light* (New York, 1951), p. 127.

The plot of the novel, seen in one of its aspects, conducts the heroine from this state of "being Mrs. Dalloway" to being Clarissa, from the abandoned ego to an emergence into full selfhood. This process is enacted through a series of insights on the part of the main character (though "summary moments" are experienced as well by other characters, notably Peter Walsh and Septimus). These moments are ordinarily dramatized in terms of particular imaged situations: the mirror, the threshold, the stair. In practice, the elements of which these images are composed — their configuration, and hence their meaning — are almost identical. All define the nature of Clarissa's experiences in the metaphor of a physical "stationing." She is placed, poised, in locations that express, because they are the meeting-points of two physical areas, the moments in which two temporal areas come together in defiance of "process."

The first instance occurs on the first page; Clarissa thinks of herself as a young girl about to "plunge" out of the house through the French window, "into the open air." At the same time, the past emotion is recollected: "feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen." The passage conveys delicately the breathless excitement and dread of youth; but it also takes its place at the head of a similar series of moments, pauses in knowledge and fear. Forty pages later, Mrs. Dalloway, reflecting on old age, thinks how little time is left to absorb "the colours, salts, tones of existence" — to achieve a fullness of life,

> so that she filled the room she entered, and felt often as she stood hesitating one moment on the threshold of her drawing-room, an exquisite suspense, such as might stay a diver before plunging while the sea darkens and brightens beneath him.

The image of a threshold between inner and outer, hall and room, air and sea, is the topographical counterpart of the limitary moment between one span of time and the next, in which the self takes breath and feels its own life most intensely. Time is arrested; then it begins again, and the ego is absorbed, "with the rest of them," in the life process.

The threshold, door, or dividing surface between two "worlds" has other significances as well, which make it unusually rich and especially appropriate for the explorer of the self. As Leonard Woolf's phrase, in the quotation above, suggests, self-awareness is to be gained first of all by looking "beneath the surface." The idea of "plunging,"

of breaking the surface, gives the clue here, and leads to the first of the analogies between Virginia Woolf's novel and *The Secret Sharer*.[5] Conrad's Leggatt, the captain's "second self," emerges from an ocean that functions, as Albert Guerard has observed, as "an image for the unconscious life."[6] The captain is beginning his voyage into self-knowledge by breaking down the barrier between two parts of his own mind; in Leggatt, he confronts and comes to terms with a part of himself that has been unrecognized, and unintegrated with his conscious life. The confrontation becomes literal a little later, in another significant image: "It was, in the night, as though I had been faced by my own reflection in the depths of a somber and immense mirror." The mirror, which creates a counterpart — another who is yet not another — is also suggested at the two points in the story when Leggatt emerges from and returns to the sea (Conrad had called it, in another book, "the mirror of the sea"). The phraseology repeats itself. The captain first notices Leggatt in "the darkling glassy shimmer of the sea"; in the final tense moment before he sees the saving mark of the hat, he looks over the rail again into "the glassy smoothness of the sleeping surface." In *Mrs. Dalloway,* one of the most fully developed moments in Clarissa's progress is stated as a confrontation of herself in the mirror; it is also a moment when she feels acutely, again, the pressure of growing old.

> As if to catch the falling drop, Clarissa (crossing to the dressing-table) plunged into the very heart of the moment, transfixed it, there — the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all the other mornings, seeing the glass, the dressing-table, and all the bottles afresh, collecting the whole of her at one point (as she looked into the glass), seeing the delicate pink face of the woman who was that very night to give a party; of Clarissa Dalloway; of herself. . . .
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> That was her self — pointed; dartlike; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting-place.

The complexity of this passage, sending out feelers into all the corners of the novel, is very great; three major elements are pertinent here. The first part of the statement suggests the value of such "moments

[5] Mr. Brower, in the essay cited above, has noted the importance of "plunges" as one of the novel's key words; but he is tracing through it a different thematic motif.

[6] Introduction to Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and The Secret Sharer,* Signet Edition (New York, 1950), p. 11.

of vision." In them are summed up the pressures of the past and the actions of the future; Clarissa can view at once "all the other mornings" and "that very night." The second paragraph provides a clue to Clarissa's uncertainty at this point in the book. The summoning of the self depends upon an effort of will, impelled by fear or by the needs of "the world." Selfhood is not yet a spontaneous harmony of being; it is composed out of still incompatible and half-known parts. Finally, the mirror image and the "plunge" into intense self-awareness reveals an important point of contact between Clarissa and her submerged self, though it is not yet contact at the deep level achieved in the captain's meeting with Leggatt. It prefigures, rather, the final awareness at the end of the novel when Clarissa "confronts" Septimus.

Mrs. Dalloway's progress is imaged, again, as she climbs the stairs; for the stair, like the threshold or the mirror-surface, can act as a symbol of the passage from one state of being to another, in which both are contained, and existence is therefore organized into a unity more complex and complete than usual.

> She began to go slowly upstairs, with her hand on the bannisters, as if she had left a party, where now this friend now that had flashed back her face, her voice; had shut the door and gone out and stood alone, a single figure against the appalling night.

This, too, is a foreshadowing of the last scene of the novel, when Clarissa leaves her own party and meets, alone, her "other self." Here, however, the future is urgently present, and, as she pauses "by the open staircase window," the self she sees is Clarissa in old age, "suddenly shrivelled, aged, breastless." A few pages later, the image of the stair recurs, enfolding the same basic significance of self-consciousness, but with a changed emotional tone.

> Strange, she thought, pausing on the landing, and assembling that diamond shape, that single person, strange how a mistress knows the very moment, the very temper of her house! Faint sounds rose in spirals up the well of the stairs.

In "the well of the stairs," a perfectly naturalistic detail, we have also an echo of the "stationing" above a surface of water before the "plunge."

The stair image in *Mrs. Dalloway* gains depth by its universal quality; like the mirror, it has ranged widely as a symbol, and some

of its incarnations illuminate this novel. In Eliot's "La Figlia che Piange," the significance of a memory that has remained peculiarly vivid in the speaker's mind is caught in the image:

> Stand on the highest pavement of the stair —
> Lean on a garden urn —
> Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair.

This picture, he remarks, "compelled my imagination many days." The symbolic range of the staircase as an image of the spiritual passage from one state to another is most completely explored by Eliot, of course, in the third section of *Ash Wednesday*. It appears elsewhere in Virginia Woolf's work, as well. Neville, one of the speakers in *The Waves,* has received as a child a crucial shock while standing on the staircase eavesdropping — symbolically stationed between one phase of childhood innocence and another, less innocent.

> I will use this hour of solitude . . . to coast round the purlieus of the house and recover, if I can, by standing on the same stair half-way up the landing, what I felt when I heard about the dead man through the swing-door last night.

Later, grown up, Neville speaks of "the revelations on staircases, moments of terror and ecstasy"; the phrase brings out clearly the basic general meaning of the image. Meanings closer to *Mrs. Dalloway* are visible in *To the Lighthouse.* Following the climactic scene of Part One, the dinner party, Mrs. Ramsay, going upstairs, thinks with a sense of accomplishment, "Yes, that was done then"; a finished "moment," which will survive, whole, into the future, has been created. A few minutes later she returns, and we see her through her daughter's eyes at the instant of triumph, "standing above them on the stairs."

> "That's my mother," thought Prue. Yes; Minta should look at her; Paul Rayley should look at her. That is the thing itself, she felt, as if there were only one person like that in the whole world; her mother.

For Prue, the essence of a personality, a unique individual — "only one person" — has been transfixed and defined in a stationary and lasting moment between past and future.

In much the same way, Peter Walsh in *Mrs. Dalloway* has a vivid memory of Clarissa as he hears the clock in St. Margaret's tolling the hour (the bell itself is significantly compared to "a hostess who comes

into the drawing-room . . . and finds her guests ready"—as Mrs. Dalloway had described herself, earlier). The bell's sound is

> like Clarissa herself, thought Peter Walsh, coming down the stairs on the stroke of the hour in white. It is Clarissa herself, he thought, with deep emotion, and an extraordinarily clear, yet puzzling, recollection of her, as if this bell had come into the room years ago.

Here, once more, the past impinges on the present to create, with visionary intensity, "Clarissa herself." The closeness of the threshold and the stair as vehicles of meaning can be seen when, later, Peter thinks again of Clarissa in phrases whose tone and resonance for the book as a whole match those of the passage just quoted. There, he remembers her coming down the stairs; here, at a door:

> with that extraordinary gift, that woman's gift, of making a world of her own wherever she happened to be. She came into a room; she stood, as he had often seen her, in a doorway with lots of people round her. But it was Clarissa one remembered. Not that she was striking; not beautiful at all; there was nothing picturesque about her; she never said anything specially clever; there she was, however; there she was.

This paragraph looks back to the earlier vision of Clarissa, and both, in turn, look ahead to the final scene and final sentence of the novel, where their phrases will reverberate with a full range of overtones. The two passages are important, too, because they form part of Peter's thought, not the heroine's, and so suggest that Clarissa's progress toward self-knowledge is not entirely a solitary one. It can be observed by others, as Mrs. Ramsay was observed by Prue; and the knowledge of a personality gained by these outsiders, while never as intimate as the ego's own understanding of itself, is in a sense more complete *because* it is detached.

The book's major movement, however, does take place in Clarissa's own mind. A last instance of the threshold image (actually its modified form, the character standing at a window and looking out) comes in the midst of the superbly complex scene of the party with which the novel ends. It is part of a summary passage in which Virginia Woolf defines the state of being that Clarissa has at last achieved. She has moved away from her party, and finding herself alone, tastes in solitude the essence of happiness.

> Nothing could be slow enough; nothing last too long. No pleasure could equal, she thought, straightening the chairs, pushing in one book on the shelf, this having done with the triumphs of youth, lost herself in the process of living, to find it, with a shock of delight,

> as the sun rose, as the day sank. Many a time had she gone, at Bourton when they were all talking, to look at the sky; or seen it between people's shoulders at dinner; seen it in London when she could not sleep. She walked to the window.

At this moment, when the passage of time, that has borne away "the triumphs of youth," is finally accepted, the past quietly assembles itself as a series of similar moments and comes to stand beside Clarissa; the self, long submerged — "lost in the process of living" — rises to the surface and finds its happiness.

Clarissa's revelation at the party, of which these sentences form only a small section, cannot be understood fully, however, until another major element in *Mrs. Dalloway* has been disengaged for scrutiny. So far, we have been blocking in roughly the outlines of one of the main themes, which is also a theme in other works of Virginia Woolf. The growth of Clarissa toward the final integration can be pursued at one level by noting a series of significantly imaged "moments," as we have seen. But the *process* whereby this goal is achieved, and with it the structural mechanism that carries the theme toward its climax, remains unexplored, though it is the chief subject of this investigation. Here too, at last, the parallel with *The Secret Sharer* emerges into the foreground.

What interests us is Conrad's technical means for solving his captain's dilemma and leading *The Secret Sharer* to its necessary conclusion. It is, of course, the device — one might say, the mythic symbol — of the *Doppelgänger*. The fugitive, Leggatt, whom the captain calls "my other self," comes aboard to share his life for a short time, and during this period the captain gradually learns to know himself. His command of himself is illustrated by the mastery of his ship as, at the end, he executes a complicated and dangerous feat of seamanship to leave Leggatt near an island where he can swim ashore. Leggatt represents the elements in the captain's character that are still, as the story opens, undiscovered. These are in part, as Mr. Guerard has said, the "more instinctive, more primitive, less rational" aspects of personality;[7] they include, however, valuable qualities of resolution and inner strength as well. Leggatt is "a strong soul." He has, clearly, reached a kind of peace within himself; the captain remarks that "he looked always perfectly self-controlled, more than calm — almost invulnerable." At the end, the captain too is self-

[7] Introduction to *Heart of Darkness*, p. 11.

controlled and calm; and his last observation on Leggatt, as several critics have noted, is equally pertinent to himself: "a free man, a proud swimmer striking out for a new destiny."

In her preface to *Mrs. Dalloway,* Virginia Woolf is explicit about the relation of Septimus Warren Smith — whose last hours form the novel's sub-plot — to the heroine. He "is intended to be her double." Taking *The Secret Sharer* as the paradigm, we can expect Septimus' qualities to be indications, by contrast, of a lack or dark place in Mrs. Dalloway, much as Leggatt illuminated the dim regions of the captain's psyche. Virginia Woolf's handling of her theme is more intricate and many-faceted than Conrad's profound but simple fable, and so the correlation between self and "double" is not so clear-cut. The two elements essential to the myth, however, are present: a leading character who is incomplete, and the catalytic double.

We are told several times — by Clarissa herself and by Peter — that there is some emptiness in her. Peter, on his first visit to her in years, thinks: "Shall I tell her . . . or not? He would like to make a clean breast of it all. But she is too cold." He speaks again, later, of "this coldness, this woodenness, something very profound in her." Clarissa's own feeling about the want in her nature is connected with her husband.

> Suddenly there came a moment — for example on the river beneath the woods at Cliveden — when, through some contraction of this cold spirit, she had failed him. And then at Constantinople, and again and again. She could see what she lacked. . . . It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together. For *that* one could dimly perceive.

Clarissa's position here can be compared to that of the captain at the opening of *The Secret Sharer.* Both characters recognize their lack of completeness, but its nature is as yet "dimly perceived"; and both are (at this moment, and alone) powerless to see more clearly. At any rate, we are assured, by both Peter and Clarissa, that the shadow in her is "something central," "very profound"; and it assumes an even greater depth when Peter wakes suddenly, thinking of her, with the phrase, "the death of the soul," on his lips.

> It was her manner that annoyed him; timid; hard; something arrogant; unimaginative; prudish; "the death of the soul." He had said that instinctively, ticketing the moment as he used to do — the death of her soul.

Even when allowances have been made for dramatic necessity in the drawing of Peter's own failures of sensibility, and his overstatement of the case, this passage must be taken as serious and crucial. The coldness at the center of Mrs. Dalloway is something mortally dangerous, threatening the icy death of the spirit. One is reminded of a couplet by Auden —

> And the seas of pity lie
> Locked and frozen in each eye.

Clarissa's progress toward selfhood is at the same time an unlocking and unfreezing of the chill at the depths, releasing in her the seas of pity. This idea is suggested by a further transmutation of the water imagery used by Virginia Woolf. "It was . . . something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact" of one human being with another. The breaking of surfaces brings one into contact not only with the sources of one's own nature, but simultaneously with the similar sources in every human nature. Knowledge of self is achieved by, and leads to, sympathetic identity with others.

Turning from the heroine to her counterpart, we find in Septimus, first of all and most obviously, the irrationality that can be detected in Conrad's Leggatt. The original secret sharer emerges from a symbolic unconscious — the ocean; Septimus is mad, and he too has visited the sleeping depths.

> I leant over the edge of the boat and fell down, he thought. I went under the sea. I have been dead, and yet am now alive.

In them both, some of the hidden impulses at the roots of our nature are exposed. One of Virginia Woolf's early notes on *Mrs. Dalloway* records her intention to present "the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side — something like that."[8] As it turned out, the relationship was not only parallel, but complementary. Septimus is the self standing behind Clarissa's image as she gazes into the mirror. In *The Secret Sharer,* the secret self merges with the mirrored self, but the *rapport* between Clarissa and her double must be achieved without a physical confrontation. Septimus' reality for her is on the plane of imagination. Reflected in him, nevertheless, is the failure of feeling that can be observed in Clarissa herself. After the war, "some-

[8] *A Writer's Diary,* 14 October, 1922; p. 52.

thing failed him; he could not feel." The real truth is, of course, that Septimus has felt too deeply, has been shaken and numbed by shell shock and the war, specifically by the death of his friend Evans; his feeling has flowed through channels deeper than any so far sounded by Clarissa. But he has never gone beyond the first paralyzing numbness to see, consciously, the reality of his emotion.

> When Evans was killed . . . Septimus, far from showing any emotion or recognising that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably.

This initial failure remains in the foreground of his awareness as "real"; and his distorted view of reality gathers strength as his madness deepens. He has failed to bring the depth of his emotion to the surface — has failed, that is, to look at *himself* without fear, to face the terror of his love. The result is a loss of self — which for Virginia Woolf, *means* madness. In *The Waves,* for example, a character describes her precarious moments of near-madness in terms of lost identity.

> I came to the puddle. I could not cross it. Identity failed me. We are nothing, I said, and fell. . . . I returned very painfully, drawing myself back into my body over the grey, cadaverous space of the puddle.

So Lucrezia Warren Smith thinks, "He was not Septimus now." The distinction between himself and the world is blurred (ironically, Dr. Bradshaw advises him to "take an interest in things outside himself"); he becomes the not-self.

> His body was macerated until only the nerve fibers were left. It was spread like a veil upon a rock. . . . He lay very high, on the back of the world. The earth thrilled beneath him. Red flowers grew through his flesh; their stiff leaves rustled by his head.

Septimus' madness, therefore, stems from a lack of self-recognition which, by the time we meet him, has become incurable. Despite its false premise, however, his is "the madness of vital truth" in one sense, and thus pertinent to Mrs. Dalloway, the "sane" member of the pair. Septimus has recognized certain necessities evaded by Clarissa, or perhaps never encountered by her. His idea that he cannot feel is false; but his reaction to this supposed fact is true. The failure becomes "an appalling crime": "the sin for which human nature had condemned him to death; that he did not feel." As a result of this

intuition, Septimus is burdened with guilt and haunted by the dead man.

> He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. . . .
>
> "For God's sake don't come!" Septimus cried out. For he could not look upon the dead.

The key to our understanding of the parallel plot, and therefore of the novel, is in Septimus' response to his guilt. Lost among his fears and delusions, he nevertheless has accepted the consequence of them. He has recognized the seriousness of his "failure," and in the end he executes the severe penalty for it upon himself. Peter Walsh had thought of some undefined failure in Mrs. Dalloway as "the death of her soul"; Septimus' emotional paralysis causes, though indirectly, the death of his body.

In these two deaths — the potential death of Clarissa's soul, the actual death of Septimus — the two strands of *Mrs. Dalloway* come together. Virginia Woolf tells us in her preface that "Mrs. Dalloway was originally to kill herself, or perhaps merely to die at the end of the party." With the invention and intervention of Septimus, this climax becomes unnecessary. He is a surrogate for Clarissa, so that she need die only in imagination, just as Conrad's captain need not commit an actual murder, but participates in bloodshed and guilt through the secret sharer. Clarissa's vivid physical realization of Septimus' death identifies her with him, so that she herself is saved. She, unlike Septimus, has been able to "look upon the dead."

> He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness.

It is "her punishment," she reflects, thus to participate in death, and at the same time to be helpless, "forced to stand here in her evening dress." It is also, however, her reward; for at the moment of participation she rises to a pitch of intense life — "nothing could be slow enough; nothing last too long." Clarissa, being "sane," has *felt* the death of Septimus consciously, as he could not feel the death of Evans; she will, therefore, be refreshed, not haunted, by the dead. "He made her feel the beauty, made her feel the fun."

It would be a mistake to burden Clarissa, or Virginia Woolf's

intention, with over-weighted notions of guilt and redemption. The suggestions of Mrs. Dalloway's weaknesses are very slight; they remain, except for the sentences about her "failure" toward her husband, more or less vague in content. We are not to look for any positive act or definite transgression that demands expiation. Clarissa's situation is, once more, that of the hero in *The Secret Sharer*. She and the captain have both reached a point in their lives where a future course is to be decided; there is potentiality for growth or for withering of the self. The soul hangs in the balance of life and death, though the full extent of the predicament is obscured for the protagonists themselves. Into this delicate situation step the two secret sharers who, each by an act of violence, reveal an unseen depth of personality to the main characters. A current of sympathy flows out from Mrs. Dalloway and from the captain, putting them in contact at once with the disorderly springs of life in another soul, and with certain irrational impulses — murderous or suicidal — in their own. Both "doubles" cease to exist at the moment when the dominant selves are completed.

The principle that underlies this pattern is described by Virginia Woolf in a reminiscence about the young Clarissa.

> Clarissa had a theory in those days. . . It was to explain the feeling they had of dissatisfaction; not knowing people; not being known. For how could they know each other? . . . But she said, sitting on the bus going up Shaftesbury Avenue, she felt herself everywhere; not "here, here, here"; and she tapped the back of the seat; but everywhere. . . She was all that. So that to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them.

Peter, whose thoughts these are, goes on to recall Clarissa's notions about "the unseen part of us, which spreads wide"; it might, she thought, "survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that." Years later, at the time of the novel's action, this evasion of death by the attachment of one's unseen self to another personality is accomplished by Septimus Warren Smith, as his violent death, and the motives behind it, become clear to Clarissa Dalloway. He is "one of the people who complete her," and so, in a sense, he goes on living. "Somehow it was her disaster — her disgrace." She thinks of the "awful fear" in "the depths of her heart": fear of death, and recognition of its intimate relation with life; fear of living itself, fear of feeling. Clarissa realizes, too, that there is a core of integrity in the ego that must be kept intact at all costs.

> A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved.

In comprehending Septimus' death — he has "plunged holding his treasure" — Clarissa herself discovers her own identity and becomes whole. She is once more, in imagination, the diver who plunges into the darkening, brightening sea to find the reality beneath the surface. The self sees itself in the mirror of another self; and out of "communication," shared feeling, "the embrace of death," the ego is paradoxically located and revealed. Clarissa has triumphantly evaded, in this moment of communion, "the agonized individuality of the lost and separated souls in Hell";[9] at the same time, she has seen the value and meaning of the "treasure," individuality, winning out over all its fears and failures.

The actual moment of revelation forms part of the brilliant climactic episode with which the novel ends — the party. Its foundations have been laid deep within the earlier sections. The Shakespearean phrases, "If it were now to die," and "Fear no more" are recurrent motifs, repeated by Septimus shortly before his suicide, and by Mrs. Dalloway at the end of the book when she accepts the gift of his death. This repetition marks the convergence of the two deaths, literal and figurative. Preparations for the party, too, have buzzed through the day, and the novel. Its importance as a register of Clarissa's personality has been indicated earlier in her thoughts about herself. Once more, there is a parallel with Conrad's story. The captain stands, at the outset of the voyage, alone with his ship, thinking of the journey ahead as "a long and arduous enterprise, the appointed task of both our existences." Just so, the party is Clarissa's "appointed task." "An offering for the sake of offering, perhaps. Anyhow, it was her gift. Nothing else had she of the slightest importance." The successful performance of this task is a sign of her mastery — of self and of "life."

The party scene itself is a microcosm of the book. Virginia Woolf recorded its importance in her diary as she was writing *Mrs. Dalloway,* and her remarks are particularly interesting because they include an image that was to become, as we have suggested, one of the keys to the novel.

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[9] Francis Fergusson, *Dante's Drama of the Mind* (Princeton, 1953), p. 198.

> There I am now — at last at the party, which is to begin in the kitchen, and climb slowly upstairs. It is to be a most complicated, spirited, solid piece, knitting together everything and ending on three notes, at different stages of the staircase, each saying something to sum up *Clarissa.* Who shall say these things? Peter, Richard, and Sally Seton, perhaps: but I don't want to tie myself down to that yet.[10]

In the end, the details of this plan were abandoned for a freer movement, and the three "notes" on the staircase disappeared. The extra stress on the stair image in the plan, however, lends weight to its earlier appearances in the book; and the purpose of the scene as a whole, "to sum up," remains in the final version. The scene begins with a sluggish and frozen period when the party refuses to come alive, and when Clarissa, greeting her guests at the head of the stairs, feels unlike herself: "She was not enjoying it. It was too much like being — just anybody, standing there." As the scene moves on, there is a gradual coming-together, enlivening, integration, until Peter Walsh can say: "Her severity, her prudery, her woodenness were all warmed through now." Even now, however, there are reminders of Clarissa's inadequacies. Sally Seton speaks: "But — did Peter understand? — she lacked something. Lacked what was it?" And again: "Clarissa *was* hard on people." At last, the party successful, Mrs. Dalloway moves into an empty room. In a place of solitude where three lives cross, she sees the old lady across the street pull down her blind, escapes from "the process of living," and participates in Septimus' death.

The novel does not end, however, with Clarissa's solitary moment of recognition. It is we, the readers, who must be given the fullest revelation. Paul Valéry, who also occupied himself with the problem of defining the ego, wrote: *"Il est impossible de reçevoir la 'vérité' de soi-même. Quand on la sent se former . . . on forme du même coup un autre soi inaccoutumé."*[11] We can never look directly at our selves, which retreat and become obscured as we gaze. Clarissa's insight is only half-articulated, though it is profoundly meaningful to her. Hence, it is left to the spectators — the other characters in the novel, and the readers who stand behind them — to see Mrs. Dalloway whole, as Prue Ramsay sees her mother on the stair in *To the Lighthouse,* or Lily Briscoe paints Mrs. Ramsay's composed form into her picture.

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[10] *A Writer's Diary,* 7 September, 1924; p. 66.
[11] *Monsieur Teste* (Paris, 1946), pp. 62-63.

The necessity that makes us indispensable participants in the novel's completeness explains, to some extent, the profoundly moving close of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Throughout the final episode, Peter Walsh uneasily feels Clarissa's absence; and, with him, we impatiently await her coming. "'But where is Clarissa?' said Peter . . . Where was she, all this time? It was getting late." When she appears at last, the force of her entrance is concentrated in the simplest of all verbs: to be. Earlier, Peter singled out an intensity of being as Clarissa's special "gift": "to be; to exist; to sum it all up in the moment as she passed." Ernest de Selincourt has an interesting note on the significance of *being* for Wordsworth, whose sensibility was curiously like Virginia Woolf's in other ways as well.

> Wordsworth seems at this time [1802] to have an almost mystical feeling for the verb "to be." Cf. a remark he makes on an early reading in *Resolution and Independence*. "What is brought forward? A lonely place, 'a pond by which the old man was, far from all house or home'; not *stood,* nor *sat,* but *was* — the figure presented in the most naked simplicity possible."[12]

It is not only simplicity that is thus presented — it is the essence of the object or the person being described. *To be* is at once the least and most expressive of verbs. Coming at the end of *Mrs. Dalloway,* it is backed by the whole weight of the novel and contains the theme — emergence into full selfhood, or *being,* on the part of the heroine. There are echoes of earlier phrases: "It is Clarissa herself, he thought, with a deep emotion," and "There she was, however; there she was." But the last incarnation rings with the purest tone, for Clarissa, gifted with the aid of a stranger more intimately known than any friend, can stand now detached from the crowd of half-selves in the freedom of full maturity. Read thus, as the climax of a structure and a meaning, the final sentences take on a brilliant inevitability, and a resonance like the bell of Big Ben, its circles raying out endlessly in the mind.

> "I will come," said Peter, but he sat on for a moment. What is this terror? what is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?
>
> It is Clarissa, he said.
>
> For there she was.

[12] *The Prelude* (1805), ed. Ernest de Selincourt (London, 1942), p. xxi, n.

LEONARD NATHAN:

Five Poems of Degrees

". . . praise is comely."

I Mercy on Zion

Mercy on Zion takes a fierce turn on this land,
Such as the horseman wheeling in the April orchard
Whom we judge uncertainly from his hidden plunges.
He flushes up a fountain of buds and leaves
With all that invisible exercise straining branches.
So different from the road to our north, running
Narrow to the ends of the promised land, a justice
Dusted by the flesh of our merciless open going.

II Saving Animosities

Sand was a lizard among the black thickets
Of the burnt pasture on the deserted grange.
This was hostile enough, unknowable as lizards,
All gone but resistance and beady blood
Coldly questioning any but the horniest endurance;
And still the eye (what vision in sight?)
Grazed in the long ranges of such barren light.

III Facing the Music

The green fire of the green leaves leaping
From the arms of the vines has lighted the landscape naturally
Along the whole promise of the morning eyesight.
On the four points of the compass the green leaps,
And there is no escape turning south from north
To white country or black or watery zones.
The green leaps and we must endure the green
Finding a solace in it no man owns.

IV Late Fire

On the green edge of April in the rain and drowned blossoms,
We built a fire and briefly were again the winter company
Considering in kin-like eachness the testimony
We would give, the witness we would bear in the ripe light
Of logs when darkness had called out our best story . . .
The pause in spring, a storming like the final season
Entering before its time to call us to a reckoning.

V Words at the Center

She said in the center of the almond orchard, in the live
Center of April, under the green and sunlight,
She said . . . I do not remember her leafy saying
For it was everywhere the woman was saying
As the young birds, as the horses distant through branches,
As the air after bees have left it relieved and blue,
As I were here this once only, wholly forever
In the loose raiment of distances, bright by this woman saying.

JOHN McGAVERN:

In the Evergreen Gardens

Consumed, this too
will settle, wholly
ash, on the dark
pinecones and holly,
if some wind blow
when heat no longer
burns in the fork-
shaped branch of hunger.

To be is to burn,
to gnaw and blacken
in the flare of noon;
always shaken,
crooked and torn,

to seem to fatten
as the wick grows down;
to die forgotten.

Consumed, this time
when you walked through shadows,
light in my look,
these doors, and windrows
will settle like salt rime,
and seem more bitter
for love's bad luck
and the last pure water.

FREDERICK BOCK:

The Race to Stand Still

News-blind from the flash of my great-aunt's death
But limber for my Sunday-sized boyhood,
I swung on for a week, then went to look.
Got lost, though, knee-deep in the pasture, next,
Where snails were charivari so slow it was
Among the tway-blades.

A thousand years—oldish, home from school—
I kept my running scratched;
Then, one attic hour of ancient groaning,
Rounded the curve again:
Unmoved, white wisps of dress
Studied the rafters as I played over, hot,
The blues collection of my fortunate youth.

And even now—when it's too late to sit barefoot
With her proud withered look gazing
From soda fountain mirrors at shiftless me—
I can wigwag past the post her weight of earth,
The wonder of the course, unwondering and go home.
My God, as a child I was never so lackadaisical.
She called me Speed.

I. TRASCHEN:

Dostoyevsky's 'Notes from Underground'

Notes from Underground has always been emphasized as a polemic against nineteenth-century rationalism — utilitarianism, nihilism, and positivism — which Dostoyevsky held responsible for the changes in Russia and Western Europe in the eighteen-sixties. His wife, Masha, was dying while he was writing the *Notes,* and his consciousness of her mortality — like that of the fictional Ivan Ilyich for Tolstoy — might well have inspired his assault on the "new thought," particularly, in this case, on the idea of progress. This analysis of the *Notes* is supported by the persistent pummeling of liberal rationalism in the major novels. It is reinforced, finally, by the present tendency among liberals to damn ourselves — so excessively we may be suspected of enjoying our damnation — for our innocent support of that monstrous child of nineteenth-century rationalism, the Bolshevik revolution.

And yet, although the *Notes* clearly rages against the new thought, I feel critics have been misled, for the reasons just suggested, into either ignoring or misunderstanding another equally important matter, Dostoyevsky's attitude towards his own spokesman, the man from underground. And this needs understanding. For the more you reread the *Notes,* the more the conviction penetrates that, while Dostoyevsky was splenetic towards liberal rationalism, he was virtually nauseated, as we shall see, with his spokesman's own romantic irrationalism. What indeed is his attitude towards his hero? Does he admire him? Does he despise him? Let us see.

We may begin by comparing him with Hamlet. Our hero is surely a projection of Hamlet's excessively refined sensibility, of his awareness of all too many sides of a question; he suffers, too, from alienation. But our hero is no Prince Hamlet; he will not die for his convictions, and so the similarities between the two work as comic ironies, as they were probably intended. The hero of the *Notes* is a comic figure (he is more, of course, as will be seen), and this is what we must first understand in getting at Dostoyevsky's attitude.

His comic nature is further evident in his excessive talk. A comic hero never stops talking; a tragic hero will act. Shaw knew this; Jack Tanner's last word, we recall, was "Talking!"

Let us look, too, at Bergson's requirements for a comic figure. He notes three: unsociability, insensibility, and automatism. Dostoyevsky's hero, alone in his underground hole for forty years, is the archetype of unsociability; as to insensibility, Bergson fails to see that sensibility, over-refined, is also comic; finally, the regularity and compulsiveness of this anti-mechanist's rages may very fairly be called automatic.

In arguing for the comic nature of the man from underground, I also draw on the familiar theory that the comic spirit thrives on incongruity; the basic incongruity is the conception of a hero as a mouse, an insect, a creature living underground. Let us see how this incongruity is exploited in one instance, the quarrel with the unnamed officer who is not even aware of the underground man's existence. Because of this unawareness, when the two are about to collide on their daily promenade on the Nevsky Prospect, our hero is forced to step aside ignominiously or be crushed. His situation illustrates Berkeleian metaphysics: his existence depends on the officer's recognition of it. And more important than his existence, his dignity. Our hero resolves to force a recognition. But the encounter must be properly prepared for, so with borrowed money he buys black gloves, a white shirt, and a German beaver collar that will be shabby after a few days' wear; with his usual ambivalence, he not only seeks recognition from someone he despises, but also accepts the equation of propriety and dignity of the middle class, whose values he contemns. And still our hero steps aside. Then one day he shuts his eyes and butts the officer head-on. "I had attained my object, I had kept up my dignity," he cries afterward. ". . . I returned home feeling that I was fully avenged for everything. I was delighted. I was triumphant and sang Italian arias." A masterful incongruity, this mingling of dignity and absurdity.

High comedy, this, but bitter comedy too, the comedy of the self. If, for Dante, hell was the state of the self, or soul, after death, for Dostoyevsky, hell is the state of the self in life. Like Dante's, Dostoyevsky's hell is, among other things, comic. No novelist has gone down into that hell and stayed so long — undoubtedly why he understood its comedy. Hell is ourselves — not, as Sartre says, other people — as is well illustrated in the quarrel with the officer. Since this gentleman is not aware of the man from underground, there seems to be no quarrel *between* them. Yet there is one. The common notion misleads us; it really takes, we see, only one to make a quarrel . . . outrageous comedy, which we rarely admit. Do we admit, for

example, in cases like those of McCarthy and the Communists, that our violence is a matter of emotional convenience — the unending quarrel with ourselves — as well as moral conviction? The quarrel with oneself, like the rages of Dante's Wrathful, is comic. But unlike Dante, Dostoyevsky puts us all in hell for it is not a moral but a natural one: hell is human nature.

If we return now to the question of Dostoyevsky's attitude towards his hero, we see it is ambiguous; we are forced to the curious conclusion that he laughs at the creature who speaks for him. But having concluded this, we must at once shift our emphasis to a few of the attractions he held for Dostoyevsky. If he merited comparison with Hamlet, it is because he too has "that within which passeth show," tragic qualities which we must not minimize in determining Dostoyevsky's total attitude.

It is not strange, of course, for a hero to be tragic *and* comic. Hamlet wears a comic as well as a tragic mask, and the composite spirit of Dante's hell — each of us is composed of all the damned — is similarly tragic and comic. But though this combination is not strange, it is more strongly characteristic of a modern hero. There is in fact a real difference, in emphasis and in attitude. As Ortega y Gasset has observed, "The modern inspiration is invariably waggish." When the man from underground is most tragic, he becomes most playful — exaggeratedly, grotesquely so. For the modern hero this very playfulness — not solemnity or earnestness — proves his seriousness. Solemnity and earnestness are the moods of certainty; and at a time when nothing is certain, banter, frivolity, and playfulness are the only moods in which one can speak seriously. Conviction today is made up of doubt. And this inability to believe in certainties issues in another difference from the past: a modern hero's conflicts remain unresolved. I understand, according to *Time* and Jacques Barzun, that this is no longer true, that we have become reconciled — though to what is not altogether clear. This irresolution is the case *par excellence* with the man from underground — who, we must admit, never read *Time* or Professor Barzun. "Why," he cries, "we don't even know what living means now . . ." and he therefore does not believe enough in anything to die for it. He is much like Prufrock, who is also alienated, as well as inert after decisions and revisions, and who can die only metaphorically while resigning himself to his bald spot and his indigestion.

To see the man from underground as tragic and comic explains the underlying ambiguity of Dostoyevsky's attitude. To illustrate, take his hero's refusal to have a doctor cure his liver. The refusal

seems to be a tragic demonstration of free will; our hero chooses to suffer, perhaps even to die, to prove his freedom. But the demonstration is at once adulterated, for we learn it is made out of spite, a spite he does not even feel. It is true that this spiteless spite proves that a man's acts cannot be predicted, that he is free to choose — and yet, this demonstration in the name of free humanity, how grotesque, how comic it is.

Dostoyevsky probably wept at the man from underground's comic absurdity and probably clapped at his tragic resolution; in any case, this ambiguity, this oscillation between — or rather, this co-existence of — the comic and the tragic defines his hero and is the source of Dostoyevsky's ironic attitude. Now this spiteless spite, the inspiration for the underground man's ambiguous resolution, suggests another modern tragic quality, the diseased mind of, for example, many of Kafka's heroes. And the disease seems always coupled with degradation. "Listen sometimes," Dostoyevsky says, "to the moans of an educated man of the nineteenth century suffering from toothache. . . . lacerating and harassing himself and others for nothing . . . [understanding] that he might moan differently, more simply, without trills and flourishes, and that he is only amusing himself like that from ill-humour, from malignancy." This is the expense of individuality in our time.

Spiteless spite is a sorry foundation of our free will; indeed, its petulance indicates that while free will exists, it is largely impotent and irrelevant. This feeling leads us directly to one other modern characteristic — perhaps the most tragic — of the man from underground, his sense of worthlessness. "Can a man of perception respect himself at all?" he asks. Recent reactions to this have been various. Some alternately thrive and retch on their self-contempt. (Pity me for my contempt, an ancient rabbi once said.) Others have turned to religion, though sometimes from a literary inspiration. Still others accept their mutilated souls — yes, as the man from underground ultimately does — with humor, however grotesque, and even with pride.

What I have been analyzing is the condition of the intellectual. Despite *Time's* effort at reconciliation, the intellectual cannot rid himself of his sense of impotence, irrelevance, and worthlessness; despite Professor Barzun's reproof that the intellectual has little cause to complain since he never before has had such a variety of backers, he is still isolated, as he must be, from men of action and accomplishment, of common sense and middle-class values, as Dostoyevsky hilariously

demonstrates in the scene of the dinner honoring the departure of Zverkov, an old school friend. Hopelessly twisted by his underground life, our hero behaves intolerably. Despite his friends' forbearance, he cannot behave differently; in fact, their forbearance, as we might expect, merely aggravates his spleen. Now we intellectuals have responded to our isolation, but I fear with more vanity than distress — our vanity increases with our isolation. We regard our isolation as a kind of martyrdom, but we had better remember, with Dostoyevsky, that it is a lopsided one, weighted heavily with contempt and hatred, with melodramatic snarls and grinding of teeth.

But Dostoyevsky was conscious of a danger worse than isolation from society, the isolation from oneself, forced by the regimentation and standardization inevitable to mass production, government, and war. The man from underground rages against these forces which make us even ashamed of being men "with a real individual body and blood . . . we think it a disgrace and contrive to be some sort of impossible generalized man." Like D. H. Lawrence later, Dostoyevsky protested against the reduction of the individual to the social abstraction of the average man.

The tragic isolation of the underground man from society and from himself measures the magnitude of his effort to preserve his identity, and is perhaps the ultimate explanation of his withdrawal. In setting us an example of how to preserve our identity this strange creature becomes a modern culture hero, mutilating his soul with forty years in his underground retreat. I speak of a retreat, and I cannot help thinking of holy men. Holy may be the last word to apply, yet the underground man's retreat is made for the same reasons as those of holy men, to find oneself and preserve oneself from passing temptations, in his case those comprised in the new thought.

But though the strategy of retreat is a grand action in the crusade against the new thought, Dostoyevsky never allowed this merit to blind him to his hero's shortcomings. We have already seen Dostoyevsky's critical attitude in his creation of a partly comic figure; I want now to develop another criticism — one neglected, I suggested in my opening remarks, because liberals had all they could do to weather the polemic against their own rationalism.

Dostoyevsky regarded the retreat underground, necessary as it was, as nonetheless — and I speak pejoratively — a romantic act. Now the underground man is a romantic, grounded in irrationalism, and it is Dostoyevsky's artistic greatness that he proceeds to a withering dissection of the very romanticism his hero had flung so triumphantly at

his adversaries. For while Dostoyevsky was harsh to his "positivistic gentlemen," he was truly joyful in his treatment of his hero — of himself, we may fairly add. And why not? Dostoyevsky has taught us that our most refined and delightful tortures are reserved for ourselves. Whom else are we really interested in?

Dostoyevsky — malicious genius — conceived the soaring, aspiring nineteenth-century romantic not as an eagle, but as a fly; not as a towering, solitary Manfred, but as a small, lonely man underground; in a word, a romantic insect. The incongruity, as I noted earlier, is comic; now, though, I want to go further and develop Dostoyevsky's analysis of the idealism in the romantic posture. He observes that the romantic thinks and does ugly things at the very moment he is "feeling every refinement of all that is 'good and beautiful' . . . ." He then remarks that an unexpected versatility characterizes romantics. Their policy is "never to lose sight of a useful practical object . . . through all the enthusiasms and volumes of lyrical poems. . . ." There are, he says, "so many 'broad natures' among us who never lose their ideal even in the depths of degradation . . . ." Perhaps Dostoyevsky's most stunning insight is that eventually depravity becomes the romantic's normal condition, *merely punctuated by attacks of idealism*. These attacks, though, lend "a certain depth of meaning" to the depravity.

To Dostoyevsky, we see, idealism is inverted debauchery — an idea also informing *Measure for Measure* and *Death in Venice* — and this is crystallized in a wickedly satiric fantasy. The man from underground dreams he is a great poet, though his material is largely stolen from others.

> I was a poet and a grand gentleman, I fell in love; I came in for countless millions and immediately devoted them to humanity, and at the same time I confessed before all the people my shameful deeds, which, of course, were not merely shameful, but had in them much that was "good and beautiful," something in the Manfred style. Everyone would kiss me and weep (what idiots they would be if they did not), while I should go barefoot and hungry preaching new ideas and fighting a victorious Austerlitz against the obscurantists. Then the band would play a march, an amnesty would be declared, the Pope would agree to retire from Rome to Brazil; then there would be a ball for the whole of Italy at the Villa Borghese on the shores of Lake Como, Lake Como being for that purpose transferred to the neighborhood of Rome; then would come a scene in the bushes, and so on and so on — as though you did not know all about it!

Like all fantasies, this realizes the power we never have in real life, and power here finally turns out to be erotic satisfaction.

The drive for power and the erotic impulse are the same thing, fused in one action. Only suggesting this idea — familiar to us now through Freud — in the fantasy of the romantic idealist, Dostoyevsky fully dramatizes it later in the famous episode of the prostitute Liza. This episode should of course first be understood simply as the climactic example of the romantic's inadequacy in a real situation, in contrast to the triumphs of his fantasy life. But it is more, a kind of political parable of reform through love. Liza believes she is loved and she reforms. But the man from underground makes violently clear that for him love is merely a disguise for the exercise of personal power filling a personal need. He declares his "outburst of passion had been simply revenge." Revenge for what? Superficially, for being seen in his rooms, this idealist, in his shabby essence. But he has deeper motives. He was drawn to Liza out of a need to be loved, but her love only taught him to hate her because he could not reciprocate — this lover of mankind, in fantasy, could not love one person, in reality. Worse than the exposure of his shabbiness, and worse even than the self-degradation and self-contempt for humiliating the girl was the knowledge — no knowledge more terrible — that he was unable to love. His passion was not love, but a means to power, in fact, the expression of his power.

But how is this a political parable? Well, earlier in the *Notes* Dostoyevsky describes reformers — the humanitarians flayed by his hero — as "lovers of mankind." Now if the reform of Liza through love is a means to power, then the reforms by the "lovers of mankind" should be similarly understood. To those who dispute this analogy I simply ask, how would a reformer react if his subject refused to be reformed? Become violent, or indignant, or even filled with pity — anything but loving enough to let go. Reform in the name of humanity is a means of power over it.

One more point. The "lovers of mankind" and the lover of Liza are alike open to this charge. It therefore becomes once again clear that Dostoyevsky is critical of intellectualism of any kind, an idea affirmed again and again in his major novels. Everyone is suspect; conservative and liberal reformers are equally guilty of seeking power. Everyone, it seems, except saints like Father Zossima, Sonya Marmeladov, and Prince Myshkin. But if these do not seek power, they

certainly exert it.[1]

Dostoyevsky identifies idealism and power, and both with the erotic impulse; put in harsher terms, public idealism and private depravity are all of a piece. Now love, selfless love, is the perennial form idealism takes. W. H. Auden, for example, says we must love one another or die. To this the underground man would reply that if we love one another we *will* die — we never hate anyone as much as the one we love; further, that selfless love is merely a mask behind which selfish eros leers. Yet love does move the sun and the other stars; if we hate one another we might just as well die. What can save us? Perhaps a love something less than ideal. I again invoke Auden, this time for his profound improvement on the biblical injunction to love your neighbor: "You shall love your crooked neighbor / With your crooked heart." The qualification may spare us from the outrageous guilt the Bible's viciously simple ideal stirs; it might realize the kind of love possible to unsaintly men.

This suggests a Dostoyevskian perversity. In the Liza scene he may be implying that we can best help others by not helping them, for help is a form of power, leading to arrogance, contempt, and pity. And pity, as Nietzsche said, is the last temptation. But our moral dilemma is then intolerable — whether we help or not we are guilty. All right, let us recognize that only saints and idiots act purely — a Sonya Marmeladov or a Prince Myshkin. Yet we must act, as a friend once chided me, for the good that survives our guilt. What if our acts are corrupt? We ought to be worried if they are not.

According to Dostoyevsky, idealism promotes political terror. But idealism is unavoidable; perhaps we can make it desirable. We might speculate how. What kind of political leader, for example, can we tolerate? — never more than tolerate, of course. At the end of *Darkness at Noon* Arthur Koestler suggests a revolutionist wearing a monk's cowl. We'll have no more revolutionists, but the monk is intriguing, at least until you begin to reflect. He connotes humility and asceticism, and though admirable, these are a strain. Where they are realized we may reasonably suspect fanaticism and debauchery lurk.

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[1] One cry of the underground man has deep political implications. Living in fantasy, when challenged by the reality of Liza in his rooms he protests that "Real life oppressed me with its novelty so much that I could hardly breathe." This may be the cry of a sick man, yet I think that we liberals who have waved the modest and apparently realistic banner with the slogan of "variousness, possibility, complexity, and difficulty," in Lionel Trilling's words, might do well to consider how much novelty we can stand. It is certainly salutary, at the least, to be reminded that change is painful — slug-a-bed, fantasy-loving, ritualistic as we are. Indeed, one tension springs from the conflict between our fear of novelty — our "conservative" tendency — and our desire for novelty — our "liberal" tendency.

I would instead prefer a leader somewhat vain, somewhat proud, and tainted with the goods of this world — a slightly crooked man. I would like him, further, to champion an ideal he does not altogether believe in, to have many doubts about himself, and above all to want to lead yet feel uneasy about wanting to.

But even this hesitant idealism may go too far; perhaps we ought to look for our model leader in Congress. One reason, certainly, why we have no political terror is that we have no idealists there. Our congressmen are preoccupied with money, and making money, as Samuel Johnson said in effect, is a matter for innocents. As long as they busy themselves with money, and not ideals, they will leave you and me alone.

A few last thoughts about the *Notes*. I said earlier that the purely intellectual life — rationalist or irrationalist, liberal or conservative — is probably its ultimate theme. Now what is unique about it, and differentiates it from Dostoyevsky's longer major works, is the absence of God, and this suggests that the *Notes* is dramatizing consciousness without meaning, the intellectual life without God. Here the intellect has a highly ambiguous value, issuing in the torments of Ivan Karamazov or Raskolnikov, or the masochistic, voluptuous despair of the man from underground. While it is necessary to free will, what direction shall this unlimited freedom take? Like the famous episode of the Grand Inquisitor, the *Notes* presents the awful burden of freedom — more awful here, perhaps, because it does not lift the burden. In a kind of preview of the episode of the Grand Inquisitor, the man from underground comes to see what absolute freedom means. "Come, try, give any one of us, for instance, a little more independence, untie our hands, widen the spheres of our activity, relax the control and we — yes, I assure you — we'd be begging to be under control again at once." The political as well as religious analogy is clear. Like ourselves, the man from underground is an orphan without a spiritual asylum. Dostoyevsky found his in the Czar and the Orthodox Church; some of our contemporaries have found theirs in a church more conveniently located.

But if, according to Dostoyevsky, God's absence has made the purely intellectual life meaningless, it has also made doubtful whether the intellectual is even alive. "Why," the man from underground cries at the end, "we don't even know what living means now, what it is and what it is called!" Then, with bitter irony about our excessive life of books, he goes on to say, "Leave us alone without books and

we'll be lost and in confusion at once. We'll not know what to join to, what to cling to, what to love and what to hate, what to respect and what to despise." This is the intellectual's condition, with or without books.

Now some may contend that two world wars, a possible third, the atom and hydrogen bombs, Communism and Fascism — all this is evidence that the Devil, if not God, has returned and has been good enough to revitalize our moral sense. We may indeed be grateful to the Communists, Fascists, and scientists for helping the Devil in this way, helping us to know what to hate, if not what to love, what to despise, if not what to respect. Though what to hate and despise has apparently become so easy to know these days that we are all suffering from acute self-righteousness. We mount our morality to ride down our hates, not our loves. It is a necessary beast, but it poisons us by making hate so easy. Where once we prayed in church, trying to love, now we watch politics on television, enjoying our hate. But we do not really lose sleep over good and evil; it is not at the center of our dread. What is at the center during those few minutes each night before we snap our souls shut is one question, and one question only, "Am I living at all?"

Notes From Underground is the modern *Book of Job;* but, afflicted like Job, we have no God to question. It is a Bible for intellectuals, but just because Dostoyevsky hated liberal intellectuals so, it is our Bible in particular. As you see, there is a kind of masochism in this, a trait which further qualifies us for the *Notes,* making it all the more ours.

CONTRIBUTORS

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A. R. AMMONS:

Whose Timeless Reach

I Ezra the dying
portage of these deathless thoughts
stood on a hill in
the presence of the mountain
and said wisdom is
too wise for man it
is for gods and gods have little
use for it so I do not know what
to do with it
and animals use it only when
  their teeth start to fall and it
is too late to do anything
else but be wise and stay
out of the way
The eternal will not lie
down on any temporal hill
  The frozen mountain rose and broke
its tireless lecture of
repose and said death does
not take away it
ends giving halts bounty and
  Bounty I said thinking of ships
that I might take and helm right
out through space
dwarfing these safe harbors and
their values
taking the Way in whose timeless reach
cool thought unpunishable
by bones eternally glides

Driving Through

In the desert midnight I said
taking out my notebook I
  am astonished
though widely traveled having
seen Empire State and Palestine, Texas
and San Miguel de Allende
to mention extremes
and sharpened my pencil on the sole
  of my shoe

The mountains running skidded
over the icy mirages of the moon
and fell down tumbling
  laughing for breath
on the cool dunes
The stone mosaics of the flattest
places (parting lake-gifts) grouped
  in colors and
played games at imagery: a green
tiger with orange eyes, an Orpheus
with moving fingers
  Fontal the shrubs flooded
everything with cool
water

I sat down against a brimming smoketree
to watch and morning found the
desert reserved
trembling at its hot and rainless task
  Driving through
you would never suspect
the midnight rite or seeing my lonely house
guess it will someday hold
laurel and a friend

KENNETH PITCHFORD:

Evening Song

Only to walk at last the dark street home
holding inside you all the light there is,
a singing sun of warmth against the cold.

Only to know at street's end waits a house,
at hall's end waits a secret room of light,
light into light, and call to close all quest.

Ask that one at the window where she leans,
keeping the dark appointments of her craft;
ask those on benches stretched which street to cross.

Ask all the shapeless heads until they turn,
eyes full of darkness and expended seeing,
milky from all the days of bearing witness.

No there's none but shakes his head, and all
unwilling in his nessus shirt of nerves,
and sensing at the root of touch no clue.

No there's nothing answers it, the journey,
if there be journey, all the signposts mad,
if there be peace beyond the pelt you have.

And yet no future but what will compel you
though not one street to walk but you are lost,
nor one hall's end but gives you back the night.

And yet no evening darkens from your sight
the last of sun but still will send its sparrows,
planing and wheeling on the glassy sky

into their highest upward arc, still lit, still singing.

HERBERT GOLD:

It Ain't Healthy to be Too Healthy

My mother no longer complains about being sick. She has made this sacrifice for my father: it is almost as if she has given up the joys of a liver, a sinus, an upper colon. Formerly she ate her heart out at bad news. I remember the bank disaster of 1932, when my father's calm betrayed a secret delight that — like a novelist beginning a new tale or like a god — he could know once again the awful joy of drawing something out of what seems to be void.

"But we're busted, it's all gone," my mother wailed.

"That lovely cash?"

"Gone! gone! my heart!" — and she clutched herself.

"We got what to eat, we got what to sleep, so why complain?" my father said. "I had a silver thumb, say, now no more silver thumb. What good is it? Even a nice silver thumb, sterling. Take a piece of bread, Sarah Heartburn."

"He can laugh." Mother pretended to read in the evening paper while holding the sick places. Her comment on the news: "He finds jokers. He doesn't care. And God and I gave him kids!"

Many of the illnesses that she permitted herself should remain a secret between my father and her. He was a man who found pleasure in disaster, and not a self-immolating resignation but an active pride, his Tartar eyes flagrantly winking, his skin flaring red along the cheekbones, his hands set to rubbing each other in the presence of another of life's troubles to be reversed. The disintegration of the bank was a nice lively occasion. The wars he had known were wars only for the winning. When he argued that *The Merchant of Venice* is not an anti-Semitic play — "is for the Jews! is *for* us Jews!" — Francis Bacon himself could not have shouted loudly enough to refute him. Summoning his body to attention with thunderclaps of hand against thigh as he recited Shylock's words:

> If you prick us, do we not bleed?
> If you tickle us, do we not laugh?
> If you poison us, do we not die?

— he invented for himself both art and interpretation. Shylock was

the one with feeling, the outraged one, the one with something to lose and the one worth saving. "Knows how to enjoy, that one. . . ." My father's passion for food, Shakespeare, and business gave him the play of power which he needed: appetite was not merely the means of putting away the claims of desire. Negligently over the years he created his chest and his shoulders by hoisting crates of oranges from the truck and ripping them open with the hammer, silvery and question-shaped, worn like a talisman in his back pocket under a sheepskin jacket. "The food terminal down by Market Street, it's just like Venice," he remarked. He knew, he munched and nodded. "Screaming and hollering. Pounds of flesh. Just like."

His wife, over-susceptible to criticism, determined like most mothers to make pain public, thinking of the pogrom in which her sister's spine was broken by a Cossack whom my father later killed with a rock, replied to his praise of Shakespeare by saying, "Oh yes, we needed it, *that* we needed."

Despite her terrible tears over the dying banks — what can you count on if not the Guardian Trust? — my mother kept the pots busy on the kitchen stove in preparation for the great late suppers and early breakfasts with which she sustained my father and five of the workers in his fruit and poultry market. No son ever forgets his mother standing spraddle-legged at the stove, tasting, ladling, stirring, nose wrinkled in disapproval as if the ingredients could be too easily flattered and would therefore not do their best. "A little something to eat, so?" she asked. "So eat," she commanded the bowed heads, answering her own question. They were already eating.

While the banks fell, the streetcars ran on time and the suburb remained quiet. If our neighbors were confused about what had been done to them — The Union Trust! The Guardian Trust! The Standard Trust! — they did not confess it in any extraordinary display. Miniature golf was a great issue. On our playground, however, the kids learned to pun: "Oh, yeah, the Guardian Trust, they *guard* your money — oh yeah?" The children joked, but not their parents; therefore more fights than usual occurred among us, and some stammered, stole chalk, developed tics, or were sent to the Principal for "difficulties in social adjustment" (peeing in the pants).

"It comes, it goes," my father observed. "Why complain?" Roosevelt had become President, surprising our suburb. A beauty parlor moved away. Maids were paid three dollars a week.

A reminder of those days seems a necessary introduction to the the goings-on in our home on Friday nights, since any account of the

time has necessarily to do with banks and ravaged economies. My father was a fruitman and a poultryman. Food is a grave responsibility: he had a market. On Saturday morning, the big day, he arose at three o'clock or earlier, except during the barren weeks of winter, in order to bargain for the choice produce in the farmers' terminal downtown. He established the custom of bringing his five essential employees home with him on Friday evenings; they took a meal with us at nine o'clock, talked and drank, slept until two in the morning on couches and on mattresses spread on the floor, and then bolted breakfast coffee and flapjacks and were off to work blinking in the fruit truck as the spring sun first spilled out day against the sky. Then at last, after being together for more than twenty-four hours, they separated late Saturday night when the store finally closed. They slept all day Sunday; my father alone among them had the strength to rise at noon for the news of disaster and the Katzenjammer kids. It was his business; the business day was his risk — the others were salaried. In a sense, then, he had created Friday Night, as God ordained a day of rest and as the florists of America created Mother's Day.

My favorite among the dormitory five was the poultryman, Red Schwartz, with his red, wrinkled, and hairy face like a peeled orange left in the sun, burly but soft-cheeked, rearing back to whinny at his own or my father's jokes. He made shadow roosters with his hands against the wall and then sent me sprawling into the air to celebrate his arrival and my bedtime. "Higher! higher!" I yelled, even if I touched the ceiling. My mother tried to stop him from *aggravating the kid,* but he was free-and-easy with us all. Afterwards I hid in the hall to inhale the mysteries of adult talk, the sleep lost in any case.

There was also Andy, small, bleak, hay-fever-eyed, with a loose girlish titter and a hard girlish voice and muscles which he practiced rippling for the "Most Handsome Grocer" contest at the annual Association Picnic at Euclid Beach. In the morning he jerked up his head in an attitude of supplication in order to rinse his eyes with the Murine carried in his pocket, then resumed the day's defiant stare from a pinched old maid's face, gathered about the flesh of nose which was wasted on his skimpy skull. I liked him least; respectful, envying, and contemptuous, he saw nothing but the boss's son when he looked at me. This was the time when some went hungry and millions feared it or ate with shame. A man with a job had a special, exposed, even dangerous status. My father's paternalism was a matter for enthusiastic gossip, and both he and his employees — proud of their ninety-hour week — referred to the union organizers as "the racketeer boys." When

Andy reported that the boys were trying to talk to him, my father said, "Talk is cheap, it's free. Did I stop you?"

Ruby and Max, the engaged ones, squatted together to shell lima beans from a hamper on our back porch. Once Max put a bean in Ruby's ear and the remainder of the evening was devoted to getting it out. Ruby squealed, then whimpered; my mother exclaimed politely, "Oh! oh!"—her mouth barely kissing the air. Dr. Grunes, wrung from sleep at midnight, was climbing into his pants when a clever squiggle of my father's finger squirted the bean into the bin. Cheers for him! Kisses and tears!. . . . Ruby took the joke like a little lady.

Most formidable of our guests was Myrna, my father's lieutenant in the store, a great sly creature who was as adept as a butcher in slipping her thumb against the scale, skilled in a thousand stunts of making overripe strawberries tempting and green tomatoes juicy, heroic in a boned brassiere, the reason that a faithful coterie of CPA's and personnel managers volunteered to do their wives' shopping. She bulged, unimpeded by a white wraparound apron with slithers of green piping. Two husbands had already died under her, and one had fled. "The coward!" she roared, holding her sides, and then winked: "I'm still hungry. . . ."

The first time my father saw her, prow forward, he had said, "Look, the one in the middle's her head." She was hired. Her shrewd eye-for-figures and her fishwife's voice daunted all adversaries; heavy-footed in Enna Jettick workshoes, she took possession. With Myrna there was none of the low forward thrust of a woman's head in dainty shivers of controlled anger; she emitted the bellow of passion proud of itself, her great flesh wallowing, and the portent of *woe! O woe!* Her appeal was limited. Most men look for little girls in whose ears they can put beans.

Red Schwartz, Andy, Max, Ruby, Myrna—the guest list at that regular Friday night supper—dined richly on foods taken from the store at the verge of spoiling, avocado pears with one bad spot and a hump of succulence, canned strawberries with soiled labels, heaps of tomatoes and stacks of cucumbers and barrels of pickles and schools of cold fish; later came platters of fried liver and onions, the jeweled sauce running. (Once a leaking pipe washed the labels off hundreds of cans, and for two years we didn't know what we would eat until the cans were opened. A lesson in humility!) In talk accompanied by the musical splash of corrupt honeydew, all the sweeter for that, they finished their supper. The wine was a special bonus of my father's

good feeling — cheap, red, sedimented, and strong, made with a loving lack of skill in my uncle's basement.

"Just don't get sick," my mother told them. "I don't mean you have to drink near beer."

The guests worshipped the boss, each according to his own knack for piety — no ceremony, of course. Myrna moved ambiguously across the room like the overfed female dog which trots down the street in June, its available rump drawing little circles for the fox-muzzled male. "I don't know your name," she had said upon first meeting my father, "but I think you're kind of cute." When she walked too fast or breathed too hard, her breasts popped like hungry twins from their damp rubber cradle. She was bigger than a man, but not too big for my father. Impatient, a worshipper of happenstance, smelling of honeydew, she snorted for exercise. She cleared her nose and looked into the handkerchief. My mother allowed accident to the opening of a can or the composition of a vegetable soup: this was a species of economy. But all, all was free to Myrna's appetite; extravagance, her only rule, did not surprise her; her great defect seems to have been a failure to be surprised, which made an evolution toward humanity difficult and slow.

On this June evening of which I speak, they sat about the back porch after dinner, talking, drinking, shelling lima beans to keep their hands busy. Ruby and Max, snapping the pods in unison, wiggled next to each other under the glare of the mosquito-repellent lamp. An occasional curious fly whanged against the porch screens and then bounced off to whang again, while Myrna said for the third time to my father, "What's this I hear about you scaring away the other bids at the auction yesterday?"

"*Scared* them away," emphasized Andy, a licker of boots who stole his groceries each week — it's only natural, Dad said — and thought my father didn't know.

"Polite," — my father's free-wheeling grin. "They knew I wanted the Pascal, they were polite."

"Scared them," Andy insisted admiringly at my father's hairy left ear.

Abruptly Dad slapped his thigh, this time with impatience, not with relish, remembering Myrna's dismissal of Andy: *A bathtub-dirtier.*

"They just ran," Red remarked, not a bootlicker but feeling the competitive stir.

My father turned his Tartar eyes toward Red Schwartz, a man whom he respected. "Maybe Square Deal Foods and Morris from

Ansel Road just didn't need any Pascal," he said, letting the ambiguity of all profound statements imply that the real crunchers of celery came to Jake's Fruit and Poultry. "Morris from East-Side-Morris didn't even show up."

While they drained their glasses, my mother had her first chance to whisper the question for the end of each day: "How much?" Even when she spread the bills and checks on a pink chenille bedspread and officiated at the ritual counting, she asked this question of my father: *How much?*

"The usual," I seem to hear him saying, or I see and smell still his gesture, a sweaty shrug in summer and a warm wet one in winter off the yellowing tufts of a sheepskin jacket as he came in, stamping off the snow. He revived an old joke: "A ruble and a half," sure that even my mother would know he was kidding. Rubles did not come in halves.

"What's a dollar come from? I mean the woid," Andy asked suddenly, imagining what he had overheard. An argument followed. Everyone had ideas.

"The right pocket! the right pocket!" Myrna roared, using any excuse to release her storm of laughter, shedding a cloud of perfume. "The right pocket, that's where!"

My father leaned an ear, cracking lima bean pods between one black-nailed thumb and his long juice-stained index fingers. "It's a German word. *Thaler,*" he announced at last.

"No!. . . . O no!" they all protested, but it was so. He smiled the sad wise smile of the man who values pure knowledge above his sentiments. I hid behind the door, wearing the old shirt in which I slept during the summer, its collar, once frayed against my father's neck, now slipping about my shoulders; I listened to the grownups. They discussed Max's ardor on his wedding night, the amorous couple abstaining, Myrna's monumental laughter and my father's hawing and Red Schwartz' steady chug-chug and mother's giggling and Andy's hee-hee's all flattering the newlyweds. The summer flies and the moths and color-blind mosquitoes which ignored the lamp contributed to the conversation, sometimes alighting to sip of the wine or, stretching, to sting its oily red surface.

From love, the talk swung naturally to food and business: for example, how to pack strawberries into a pint box to make them look better and more plentiful than they actually were, insulated from the bottom with a slanting lining of paper, shaken until sheathed like individual rosy ideals in a cushion of air, each one floating alone in the

aristocracy of the expensive, the richest on top. In business the shifting tensions of competition offered even the apprentice after-school fruit clerk a chance to express his creative strivings. The operation of packing a strawberry pint box demanded daring, dexterity, an acute eye and sense of balance, and an equilibrium between thumb-on-the-scale greediness and a dismal Sundayschool morality. Those like Myrna or Red Schwartz gave a great deal for twenty-four fifty a week, and took.

My father unravelled the clues to philosophy in a fruit-store on Saturday afternoon. When the talk came to chickens, my father made a brave speech to prove that his sense of justice survived even an essential deceit. Mrs. Chicken-Picker's fowl had its firm yellow flesh patted and praised, held high for inspection; it travelled downstairs to its gutting; there, a busy butcher-boy slapped it to one side and sent up another which was already poised in readiness. The butchers could not spend the busy days scraping innards; they prepared in advance for the Saturday rush, so that the same chicken might commute in the dumbwaiter from the basement and back a hundred times on the Saturday before the Fourth, being tirelessly replaced and then purchased from the display case by a hundred women who prided themselves on their ability to judge a springer.

"The strawberries are good, a good buy all the same," my father said. "And chickens! Why, the chickens are the talk of the town! Every Monday they come back" — he meant the women — "and they tell me, 'I sure know how to pick 'em, Jake. I can get a good chicken out of you, Jake,' they tell me. And they're right, those chickens are all Grade-Triple-A-One, gizzards as clean as mine, fresh *pupicks*. Those ain't soupers, those ain't restaurant birds. Those ain't no hanky-pank roosters, those chickens! I'll singe the pinfeathers and roast the worst of them myself any day you name, the whole city can come, I don't care if you stuff it with parsley, *my* chickens."

So saying, he tiddly-winked a bean down Myrna's bosom, the bean slippery and chill, everyone loosened in laughter by his speech and by the bean now at her navel. She celebrated more loudly than the rest, turning the joke back at my father. Encouraged, a few moments later he performed the same trick on my mother; the bean got stuck; she extracted it with two dainty fingers and said wearily, "Jake, it's not funny." This statement, true but careless of skill, unconscious of its portent, manifested a fatal flaw. The trial by lima bean had set into motion forces large enough to bring down empires and close fruit stores.

"I'm sorry," my father admitted soberly. "I know it ain't funny, ain't it?"

"No," my mother repeated.

Myrna munched a pod as she studied past rumpled chins the path between her breasts. Sleepily the party unwound. An inconclusive debate on the origin of tangerines — "What I mean, who invented it?" Andy asked — was marred by my father's silence.

We have to work out the rest of this story from scantier data. The women, Mother, Ruby, and wakeful Myrna, cleaned the wooden platters on which liver and onions had been served, only their breath mingling. Mattresses, beds, and couches were assigned — Red in the room with me, Ruby on the parlor couch and Max discreetly on a mattress there, Andy in the kitchen; Myrna insisted on making a place for herself on the back porch and refused an extra cover. They climbed away separately, as appointed, heavy with work, food, and talk. They had only a few hours. "Gotta sleep fast tonight," Red remarked. "We all work together, we can add up eight hours."

Many soft palates vibrated; I dreamed inconsequently. My mother's body rolled into the sag of her bridal mattress. My father (let us say) went to offer Myrna a quilt; perhaps repose could chill even this woman. He found her breathing juicily, uncovered amid the smell of pods and spilled wine, a mountain sleeping. She awakened. She might have remembered his name: "Jake!" I suspect that she made some irrefutable physical gesture to which he responded with the instinctive rush of a powerful and thrifty workman; but perhaps it began with a sly joke about the two tiddly-winked beans. Both elements, hospitality and instinct, culminated in a few moments of my father's dozing while Myrna subsided heedlessly in the morality of pleasure.

Now we come to the sad part. Andy, jealous of my father, jealous of Myrna, an idealist in pure jealousy, had lain alert and blinking in kitchen gloom. He heard enough — not much was needed — to stimulate him to sacrifice his interests to his ideals. He arose, peeked into the porch on tiptoe, descended quickly, padded across the floor toward the bathroom, paused at the door leading to my parents' room, and sneezed.

He listened, the cartilage of his ear pale in a spear of moonlight. He took a breath. My mother damply slept on. He put his nose to the crack in the door and sneezed so hard that his forehead rapped the knob like a cleaver and the doorjamb creaked open! *Tchew!* Serving his jealousy, he sneezed. A man so eaten by envy that he could sacrifice his job in a deed of heroic malice, emotion freckling the skin which flared back from his nostrils, Andy sneezed. He listened while

he sneezed. He peeped through reddened eyes; the skinny head bobbed on its stalk. He sneezed like a librarian behind whispering children; he sneezed like a goat whose nose has been tickled. Tchew! Patiently he snuffed out my mother's dream. He stood before her door and sneezed, put his nose to the crack and sneezed, sneezed with inspiration. He sneezed, too, because his blood was thin. Such unselfish jealousy is always a surprise, as is the white worm which can sometimes be found in the cleanest, greenest Ohio Valley pod. Ah-*tchew!*

"What's the matter with you, you crazy barefooted? — you sick?" my mother demanded, barely awake, coming to the door in her nightgown. "I'll ask Jake for the mentholator."

"I think my blood is too anemic," Andy said.

She patted her hairnet. She moved past him and went looking for poor Dad.

She found him. Poor Dad! She woke him up.

Even if she had been granted an aptitude for discretion she would have awakened him; he could catch a cold like that. Before she screamed, before she howled, before she brought them all running and the lights flashing in the house, she murmured one intimate word for his ears alone: "Bad. Bad." All the banks had failed at once. We milled like stunned depositors about the mattress where Myrna and Dad lay.

My mother wailed, the long line of her upper eyelid taut and thick above the pupil. "Bad, bad one!" Myrna, who was hungry, contemplated her watchfully. My father lay with the sheet pulled over him until we went away.

Later he got dressed. "What are you doing in the toilet so long?" he asked her.

Her voice came through the door, the sound muffled by running water: "Eating my heart out." But the men went to the market as usual; the women opened the store.

The next year, he went into the bowling alley business. "It's cleaner," Mother said. "No spoilage. Less responsibility. Less aggravation."

My father, however, in a tan flannel jacket and a sky-blue sport shirt, surveying his crew of puerile pinboys, his pockets empty of all but money, must occasionally remember the silvery crating hammer and the battles of the Terminal fruit auctions. Now he never sees the sunrise from the windows of a truck. These days, instead of criticizing *The Merchant of Venice* and chain-store chickens, he puts forth

the claim that the movies are getting better lately, and adds, "It says by the paper Mary Pickford, she looks as lovely as ever."

"Look at him, he sleeps all day," my mother complains during the summer off-season. "You think he got maybe no blood pressure? He eats my heart out."

"Oh, my feet, my fallen arches," my father groans.

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